

主月の祓魔師

ウィークエンド・ヒーロー

エクソシスト



加藤和恵 矢島綾

小説... JUMPj BOOKS

[Expand]

Credits and Translator's Notice:

Novel Illustrations

Chapter 1: Weekend Hero

◎ 週末英雄



A certain older lady once said that I chose the gun as my weapon because of my cowardice.

Wanting to keep a distance from demons is the proof that you are afraid.^[1]

Father said.

You keep a distance not because of fear.

It is the proof of wanting to protect even more people.

Just like when I was still young, he smiled and patted my head.

—I want to become an exorcist like Father.^[2]

This is a story that happened when the twins of South Cross Male Monastery were still in junior high.^[3]

The gun which was designed to shock, gave a blue glow inside the school bag.

Okumura Yukio did not want to let his surrounding classmates notice him secretly reading messages. After reading it nonchalantly, he left his seat quietly.

It is now the break during dismissal, the class was full of the joy of students.

The teacher was chatting with an unnamed student. It seemed to be consultation for the upcoming text.

[—Nakao-sensei, are you free now?]

[Oh, Okumura. What do you need?]

The teacher turned around and looked at Yukio. His requesting to leave early due to feeling unwell was the usual, so the teacher answered him immediately.

[You better take care of your health, the end of term is coming soon.]

[Yes.]

[Maintain the first position in the level, I have high expectations for you.]

Yukio bowed respectfully to the smiling teacher to show his regards. Once he reached his seat, the surrounding girls immediately came to show concern for him.

[Okumura-kun, you're leaving early?]

[Eh—leaving early again? Are you alright?]

[Don't force yourself if you don't feel well?]

[Do you want us to send you to the school gate?]

[I'm alright.]

I'm appreciative of everyone's concern, but please don't create an uproar. Anyway, you all don't look happy, more like onlookers. Yukio showed an irritated forced smile to the noisy girls, while rapidly packing his bag and leaving the class.

A few boys were chatting at the corner of the corridor.

They looked at the back of Yukio holding his bag, seemingly implying a message that [This guy came again]. However, they did not have any evil intentions, and Yukio kept ensuring his distance from everyone. Being too close or too detached from others, would only hinder his smooth-sailing school life.

He wants to be an acquaintance, it would be best when after everyone graduated, they would only remember him when flipping the yearbook. There's no need to be too outstanding or too antisocial.

While passing them, part of the conversation flowed into Yukio's ear with the wind. One of the boys mentioned Yukio's name as said: [Okumura, he.....]

[His body is so weak, how different from his older brother.]

[I heard that his older brother was fighting with people from other schools again]

[Really?]

[Yeah, and it was with people from Shougyou high]

[How fierce, fighting with high school students...]

[Moreover it was win with one versus ten.]

[Totally a demon.]

Their conversation topic switched from Yukio to his older brother, his older twin—Okumura Rin is someone who was often talked about, although the rumours were all negative— Ignoring the classmates who were having a heated

discussion over his older brother, Yukio left the corridor quickly.

What he did not want most is to meet the older brother whom those people mentioned in their conversation, because he would need to find a non-existent reason for leaving early. Yet Yukio's worries were groundless.

He could have skived off again. In the morning, his older brother who set off together with him had left halfway, but this kind of thing did not start that day as well.

Yukio who usually worried about his older brother's behavior, could only feel relief in his heart at this moment.

The students were celebrating their short break while Yukio pushed through the crowd to push the back door. Walking in the afternoon calm of the residential area, just now's ruckus seemed like a dream.

Yukio took out his phone from his bag, placed it at his ear while walking briskly.

[—Yes. I am Okumura, now rushing to the scene in around ten minutes.]

At that moment, Yukio's expression was not of the delicate top student of the past.

It was a warrior-like solemn expression.

Yukio changed into the uniform of the True Cross Order and reached the scene. Yellow warning tape with [True Cross Order-KEEP OUT] surrounded the first level of the True Cross Academy. Many passers-by looked over.

[It's very dangerous now, civilians, please retreat!]

A man was redirecting the public in front of the warning tape. Yukio showed him his license and said: [I am Okumura, Middle Second Class.]

The man was surprised at Yukio's age and said:

[Thanks for the effort.]

But immediately let him go after formalities.

[— Okumura, thank goodness, you're fast.]

An old exorcist appeared, he was one of the middle first class exorcists that

Yukio recognized as a veteran Aria. With his old age, he should have retired.....

[Because my school is nearby. Is Motegi-san the leader?]

[Yes, he is. This morning many cases occurred and because there are not enough exorcist manpower, even an old geezer like me had to be deployed to help.]

Motegi smiled warmly while answering before turning serious the next moment to explain the situation as more people from the main building came to them.

The man who was possessed by a demon took over the building, and the hostage is.....



Yukio held his gun and walked in front of Motegi to the deep staircase.

The structure of the building has been committed to memory.

[Okumura?]

Motegi who could not guess Yukio's intentions asked softly:

[There's no need to start finding from the rooms of the first floor?]

[Yes. I think he should be at the rooftop.]

Yukio answered without even turning around.

This building was separated from the other, just like an isolated island, so it was easy to surround it with the enemy not able to escape easily. This demon held on by holding a hostage. It was surely not a bright one.

This kind of demon has a tendency to escape upwards.

Because the building was out of electricity, of course the lift could not be used. After running up nine stories of stairs in one go, young Yukio was alright but the old Motegi beside him was panting heavily.

Yukio planned to show himself to the demon first and asked Motegi to hide in the stairway for now to wait for further orders.

[When I immobilize the demon, please use your Aria artes to exorcise immediately.]

[But you alone...]

[I can do this.]

Smiling to the unsure Motegi, Yukio heaved and forced the door leading to the rooftop.

As expected, the demon was there, surrounded by many other smaller ones. The possessed man turned around, showing both eyes with bloodshot mud yellow sclerae.^[4]

[I thought that the damn exorcist has finally come, and it's just a guy like this brat. Ha ha ha... exorcists are so lacking in people.]

The demon with a hoarse and piercing voice showed a mocking sneer.

Although the body was that of a human male, but both ears were thin and pointed with monster-like horns on the head. Showing a curly long tongue in a big bloody mouth, it grabbed the hostage, as if it could break the youth's thin neck in an instant.

Yukio complete ignored the demon, showed a warm smile to the pale youth who was trying his best to hold back tears and said: [Are you Teru-chan? Listen to me, be careful—understand?

[Mmm, mmm...]

[It's alright, you can definitely do it.]

Looking at Yukio's gentle smile, the pale youth in the demon's hand nodded slightly.

[Bastard, don't treat me like air... Damn it!]

The ignored demon was fuming and he grabbed the youth's neck even more tightly. Snarling explosively, the demons gathered around it also dispersed instantly.

[What {be careful}? Do you even get the situation?!]

With his neck being grabbed even tighter, the youth's expression contorted in pain.

Yukio still did not budge and calmly kept his distance from the demon.

[Stop talking big... if you dare to shoot, I will go with the brat, ha ha ha... I'll see how do you save him? Do you kill me with the brat? This doesn't seem too bad either.]

The demon sneered at Yukio.

Then it looked at Yukio's legs and said:

[Anyway both of your legs are trembling so much, from just now it's so noisy... have you wet your pants yet? A brat is just a brat, ha ha ha ha.....!]

The demon laughed even more.

[What a naïve one.] Yukio coldly replied. [You really think that I won't dare to

shoot you?]

[Ah.....? What did you say..... bastard.]

Yukio aimed the gun in his right hand to the demon's forehead. The demon held back its sneer when he saw it and twisted his face while snarling: [Go ahead and try! When you shoot, he can't run!! You will blast a bloody hole on the brat's head with his brains flying. Damn exorcist, do you dare to shoot!!]

The demon once again tightened its grip on the youth to its limit, wanting to challenge Yukio.

Yukio pointed the barrel from the demon's forehead to the sky instead. The demon thought that this was the only thing Yukio could do to struggle, thus mocking him again.

[Ha ha ha ha... Where is your barrel pointing to? Moron.....]

[Alright, so who is the moron now?]

[What did you say?!]

Receiving Yukio's challenge, the demon threw a tantrum. One arm grabbing the youth's neck, it approached. Yukio took the opportunity to shoot towards the sky.

With the deafening gunshots, the bullets were sucked into the air—with a blinding light shining the surroundings.

[What.....!]

Both of the demon's eyes faced the glaring light and suddenly let go so the youth took the chance to escape by squatting. The demon who had lost its hostage brandished his hands in the air.

[Damn it, go to hell you brat!]

Yukio did not let this opportunity go to waste. He faced the barrel of the left gun to the demon's right shoulder which had an opening and shot twice continuously.

The demon screamed in agony and collapsed to the ground.

Yukio held the youth who was clutching his head and turned back to shout:

[Motegi-san!]

Motegi who heard his name appeared from the staircase and started to perform his aria.

[«I ask you, is the golden scale of your heart out of equilibrium?»]

[D-damn exorcist...]

[«Whether inclining to idleness, whether inclining to either wrath, lust, greed, envy, gluttony or pride.»]

The demon tried to resist a few times, but after being shot with two holy silver bullets, he did not even have the leave its vessel.

[«In the name of diligence, chastity, kindness, patience, charity, temperance, humility as virtues, gather the light of faith, cleanse the darkness of thou.»]^[5]

After the aria, Motegi drew a holy cross in the air.

The demon was destroyed while it was moaning, the man also lost consciousness and collapsed on the ground. Motegi checked his temple pulse and his mouth to ensure that he was still breathing. Affirming his findings, he nodded forcefully to Yukio.

Slightly nodding to acknowledge, Yukio turned to the youth. The boy was still on the ground, entirely stiff and clutching his head.

[Teru-chan, you did well, it's over.]

[Oh.....oh.....]

Large tears started appearing. The youth burst out crying, he had been holding back so much tears until now.

Yukio loosened the youth's rigid arms and gently stroked his thick hair.

Although he was far from being as good as his adoptive father, but being able to save this strong youth who loved his younger brother so much, Yukio felt relieved inside.

[How interesting, Okumura. It's hard to believe that you're a junior high student who became a exorcist for more than a year.]

After cleansing the youth's temptaint, sending him back to his mother and

younger brother, Motegi praised Yukio greatly.^[6]

The man who became a vessel was sent to the True Cross General Hospital after the Doctors administered emergency treatment on him.

Now the other two exorcists who were late are now cleaning the scene.

[No, it's all thanks to Motegi-san who prepared the aria.]

Yukio respectfully answered. Motegi grimaced, shaking his head and said:

[You don't need to be so humble. You really are Fujimoto's treasured apprentice, no wonder everyone call you a genius—But in this kind of situation, you can even tell Teru-chan the general plan. What kind of magic did you use?]

[I used a series of sounds.]

[A series of sounds? Ah..... so you used Morse code huh.]

The experienced Motegi immediately understood and he applauded by clapping.

Yukio used the sole of his shoe to produce two types of sounds to transmit Morse code to the youth.

—The meaning is: When the sky flows, squat immediately.

He looked at the youth's eyes while using his gaze to ask him to notice what was beneath his feet.

[Because boy scouts know Morse code, so I was inspired..... luckily Teru-chan had noticed my intention.]

[I see, but it's thanks to how you could think of it in such a short time.]

Motegi exclaimed admirably.

Yukio waved his hands and said: [This isn't much.] and pushed his glasses up slightly.

[I used to do that with my older brother, so I know of it.....]

He remembered how Father tried his best to bring up Nii-san to be an upright person.

Because Nii-san caused trouble, the brothers both never continued to join.

But the both of them were fascinated by Morse code. Afterwards they used it for a while.

—What are we eating today?

—It seems to be curry.

It was this sort of message that could be spoken but they used cutlery to knock on the table. He still remembered that Father scolded them by saying [How noisy.] a few times.

[Older brother? You have an older brother, is he an exorcist too?]

Facing Motegi's question, Yukio secretly regretted saying more than what was needed. He immediately denied by saying: [No—!] and at the same time ensured that his tone was not too harsh.

[Aniki is just an ordinary person.]

His voice seemed to be reverberating in the skies.^[7]



9.12 PM

After dealing with the incident and the report to the higher-ups to the Order which unknowingly took much some time. By the time Yukio went back to the South Cross Male Monastery where he lived in, it was beyond the time that a junior student should be home.

His Order uniform has been changed back to school uniform. When he walked into the room, he checked for traces of the smelly sulphur smell again.

Yukio then realized for the first time that his right hand was trembling nonstop.

(The uneasiness in my heart appears only now...)

The fear of not being able to save the youth, the terror of failure.

The feelings which were suppressed during the battle surface occasionally like an aftershock.

As if going back to the time when he was still afraid of the darkness.

[.....]

Yukio peered under his glasses to see his slightly trembling hand. He used his other hand to grab it tightly and walked into the monastery.

The monastery which closed early had lights out early so everyone should have finished their dinner.

[Oh! You're really late tonight, Yukio.]

[—I'm home.]

Yukio replied with a smile, at the same time.....

Is my face maintaining the usual smile?

Has my hand stopped trembling?

Yukio forcefully suppressed the questions and uneasiness in his heart.

He passed by his older brother's bed and placed his school bag on his own study desk. The heavy metal sound startled him a little.

But his older brother seemed to have not noticed.

The guns were just hidden in a nook at the bottom of the school bag.

[I say—the strap will break someday if you stuff it]

[Eh.....?]

Nii-san's words alarmed him again.

[Anyway, is it packed full with textbooks that it's going to explode? Exchange bag with me? My bag doesn't have any textbooks, it's really durable.]

[Ha ha ha.....Nii-san's bag is so dirty scrap paper and biscuit crumbs. I appreciate your thought though.]

Yukio gave a sigh of relief.

He lifted the school bag containing the guns, stuffed it into a gap between the desk and the wall while trying to avoid his older brother's line of sight.

Nii-san thought that Yukio was studying until so late at the True Cross Academy's library.

The younger brother wanted to go to an elite and famous private school; but the family had no extra cash for extra tuition classes. This probably made the older brother feel quite concerned.

However, if he knew that the younger brother was not battling in the library and it was actually a battlefield resounding with gunshots, what kind of expression will the older brother show?

While thinking, Yukio's line of vision suddenly stopped at his table.

[—?]

Behind the reference books, there was a huge plate.

Lifting the cloth on the plate, there were three hearty onigiri.^[8]

[...Did Nii-san make these?]

[Oh—please feel free to enjoy it.]

[You sound like Father.]

[Who did you say is like the old geezer... don't talk nonsense.]

Rin who was still stuck in his rebellious phase was so angry that his face as red. Yukio who slightly grimaced picked up an onigiri, feeling its warmth.

[What old geezer, is it Father? Nii-san used to clearly call [Tou-san] properly, and why did you make three of them?]

Although he was at that age where he had a huge appetite, three onigiri is really too many.

Hearing Yukio's question, Rin proudly chuckled which gave him a bad feeling.

[This is Rossian roulette onigiri, wise old younger brother.]

[Rossian roulette..... Are you referring to Russian roulette? Who is the wise old youngerbrother now?]^[9]

[Let's not mind about such small matters. You'll become bald at a young age, four eyes.]

[No, I will not become bald. Anyway, there's a bomb in one of them?]

His bad feeling seemingly confirmed, Yukio stared at the onigiri suspiciously.

The probability is one out of three.....

[Oh right, what's in there?]

[Chili sauce, chocolate and strawberry mochi.][10]

[Oh no, if this is the case, all of them are bombs.....]

So this is a Russian roulette with a magazine filled full with live ammunition. It's best to have that idiot proudly try it out.

Cooking is this older brother's only skill for living, but he liked to overdo things.[11]

Yukio put back the bullet—no, the onigiri back on the plate and sighed.

[By the way.....] Yukio changed the topic.

[How is tomorrow's charity concert going?]

[Ah, the charity concert, it seems that I need to help out.]

Tomorrow which is Saturday had a charity concert organised by the church. This is one of the mission contributions. The money raised will all go to underprivileged children.

The performers are newcomer idols who have not started their careers, unknown folk singers, a jazz band that was slightly more famous etcetera because of their low fees. The location of the concert is also not a concert hall, but it was upstairs of the department store in the compound of the True Cross Academy.[12]

Because the budget was limited, the monastery also had to send the hymn choir to perform. The brothers also had to give external assistance.

The assistance given is not performing in the choir. Instead, it is taking the roles of workers and doing errands.

[It's finally Saturday, how troublesome—]

Rin complained while rolling on the bed.

[It's alright. It's alright.]

Yukio consoled his older brother.

At this timing, using food to bribe him would be the best solution.

[Maruda-san says that if you do your tasks properly, there will be meat for dinner?]

[Is that for real? Sukiyaki?]^[13]

Rin sat up abruptly with his eyes giving out an ecstatic glow. The effect was so shocking that Yukio had to move back half a step.

[I'm not sure if it's sukiyaki though.....]

[This is wonderful! I've won!! Meat!! Yay~~ Yukio, you have to do a good job too! If you slack you're done for.]

Now Nii-san suddenly became very energetic, screaming just like a dog in the night. Looking at his older brother, Yukio sighed softly again.

(Hopefully I don't have to be summoned by the Order.....)

He worried about it in his heart.

This is a 14 year old teenager who was troubled every day.



[Ah, this is the roof of the department store.....]

Under the cloudless sunny sky, Yukio gazed at the venue of the event and said softly.

He was not wearing a uniform and wore a white wool shirt and a western jacket. It is now late February but the weather was unusually warm so one would not feel cold even without a blazer.

Beside him, Rin who was carrying boxes only wore a hooded T-shirt and jacket, casually attired.

With the sun shining warmly, the good weather would invite more crowds. It looks like losses could be prevented. Yukio knew that the monastery needed funds and gave a sigh of relief for a moment.

[Nii-do you remember when Father brought us here before?]

Oh.....Yukio who was setting up the reception counter asked casually. Rin who

was unpacking boxes answered: [.....is it to watch the Blue Fighter show? How nostalgic.]

Blue Fighter was a children's superhero show that aired every weekday night since around ten years ago.

Ao, an ordinary high school student, is actually a hero of justice of unknown origin who carries the burden of the world and valiantly fights against evil organisations—Although the content is cliché, but the various special moves and the young hero fighting against the villains were still idolized by the young brothers.

Using newspaper and cardboard to make swords, tying blue cloth on their necks, the two brothers played Blue Fighter games. As both of them wanted to be the hero, so their adoptive father Shirou always had to act as the villain. His strange laugh was so realistic that one would have thought that he was really a freak.

However...

[[Oh.....I, I'm dying.....]] After he said that while falling painfully, he would suddenly rise and say: [[Hahaha, you idiots! How can I be defeated by such lousy attacks!]] Because he would pretend to be dead and counterattack, so they could not lower their guard. Afterwards, the brothers would get tickle attacks from Shirou and roll on the ground laughing. They still remembered that because there was a Blue Fighter show that day, so they begged their busy adoptive father to bring them to the roof. Due to some mishaps before setting out, the show had just started when they reached. The many families who also came to watch the show made the venue extremely packed so the small sized brothers completely could not see the stage at all. A sad Yukio burst into tears. [So I said we had to go off earlier! It's Dad's fault for dragging the timing!] Rin, almost crying, followed by protesting loudly. [[I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Don't be so angry.]]

Shirou smiled and easily lifted both brothers to his shoulders.

[How's this? Can you see it?]

Although he was young, their adoptive father could lift up two children like it was no big deal.

Once their view became much higher, the hero on the stage could be seen clearly immediately. **How wonderful~~** Rin cheered loudly and Yukio also stopped crying while grabbing Shirou's neck tightly.

The memory of the hero show had already faded with time, but at the part where Father carried himself, his arm felt warm, refreshing his memory.

[It's still here now.]

[The hero shows?]

[I don't know about the hero shows, but it's still airing on television.]

It was an old ten year old show anyway. Yukio tilted his head puzzledly while Rin took out decorations from the box and placed it carelessly on Yukio's assembled table and answered: [It's the engraved version that is popular now.]

[You mean the engraved version?]^[14]

Yukio disliked his older brother's tasteless decorations so he took the box and said [I'll put it up.] and took action. The colourful Tanabata decorations made of origami paper and shiny thread were made by the children who went to the church often. It was not just the messy appearance; there was also some extra glue that was not dried yet.

However, the effort can be felt from every one of them, which would touch one's heart.

[Four eyes, you'll get bald if you're so fussy.]

[I won't get bald. Anyway, I thought that the engraved version would be out much later.]

Maybe it was due to how there were no more new projects..... Yukio thought.

[Because Blue Fighter is so cool.]

In contrast, Rin said something like this.

[Wielding a sword, killing the monsters? It makes people so happy.....]

Rin rolled up the handmade programme on his hand, pretended that it was a sword and waved it: [It will become crumpled like this.] Yukio said while snatching the programme from his older brother.

Yukio flattened the programme on the table. Standing next to him, Rin whispered:

[.....Blue Fighter should have lots of comrades by his side and be popular with the girls.]

[? What's up? Saying something like this.]

Yukio raised his head from the programme and asked. He felt that this lonely tone with a tinge of helplessness was completely unlike his older brother's bright and optimistic personality.

[Nii-san?]

Yukio tried to read his older brother's expression, but Rin reverted back to his usual smile and said: [Never mind, pretend that I never said anything—]

[Hey! Rin, help to move this speaker, it's super heavy.]

At that moment, a familiar monastic who was moving the equipment to the stage shouted.

[Oh—I'm coming now.]

Rin quickly went there without even looking back.

A lone Yukio stayed at his position, gazing at his older brother's back for quite a while before arranging the programmes at the side of the counter.

—He should have lots of comrades by his side and be popular with the girls.

Nii-san's casual remark kept reverberating in his ears.

Is this really the case?

The clichéd masked superhero plot, which is the protagonist, Ao being not able to let others know his true identity. If his family and his lover Oume Takeuma found out, he can no longer transform into a superhero. He struggled with this all the time, finally fighting alone. His usual self is just an ordinary high school student, not the Blue Fighter who fought monsters to protect the peace of the world.

These two personalities deviated from each other. I am both; neither is me.

The lonely soul always drifted like duckweed.

Looking at his heart again, he then realized that it was completely empty.

Maybe, the so-called heroes are all alone.

—Yukio grimaced, he was really thinking too much. He could not help but feel that he was thinking like an old man.

Despite being already in junior high, he was still childish in idolizing a hero like a child. But pondering about the heart of a non-existent hero, it was too laughable to relate it with his own situation.^[16]

Yukio took some spare change from the box to serve as change and sorted it into a box.

Rin was beside the stage humming: [Sukiyaki, sukiyaki ♪] while easily moving audio equipment that is as tall as him.



[Everyone , please enjoy South Cross Department Store's Charity Concert.]

After the host finished speaking, a lively applause sounded.

Driven by the early spring-like and warm atmosphere, the venue was filled with lots of tourists Yukio was in charge of selling tickets and distributing program guides at the counter. Rin was dressed up as a white rabbit mascot with a donation box in front of him and gave out balloons to the children who came.

Usually, his older brother would never wear the mascot outfit even over his dead body. But the magic words of [If you work hard, there will be meat for dinner.] were effective. Even when cheeky children challenged him by asking something like [You're a rabbit right? Let me see you jump.], he could only mentally beat up the brat and not go mad. This tolerance is unbelievable to Yukio.

Afterwards, the tourists kept coming. As the South Cross Monastery's hymn choir sang, Yukio casually looked at the audience. (There are not enough chairs...) Just in case, twenty more chairs were brought at first.

[Nii-san, come here.]

Yukio called softly to his older brother who was wearing a white rabbit mascot costume and resisting the urge to yawn.

[Could you go to the back and bring ten chairs to the audience?]

Yukio quietly requested.

[Eh—while dressed like this?]

[It's hard to move my arms, actually movement is hard for me all over.] Rin could not resist but to complain.

[I need to mind the counter.]

Yukio crossed his fingers and pleaded Rin.

[I mind the counter, you go.

[With your hands like this, can you handle money? Also, Nii-san, can you give change?]

[Don't look down on your older brother. This is nothing to me.]

[Then what is 1250-750?]

[—Uh, 300?]

[It's 500.]

In the end, it was still the allure of [There will (...probably) be sukiyaki tonight.] that made Rin arrange the foldable chairs in the white rabbit costume.

The hymn choir sang on the stage before the unknown folk singer went on stage. The melodious voice sang about the innocence and sadness of youth.

It could be due to the roof of the department store, other than mostly small families, there were also high school sweethearts, cliques of female customers, university buddies, unsupervised elementary school students and loving old couples.

Although they just wanted to kill time, the audience all happily paid attention to the stage.

(How peaceful.....)

Thank goodness, the handphone in the pocket did not ring. Hopefully it would

remain this way, no emergency signals before the end of the concert.

Yukio sat on the chair of the counter and gave a small sigh.

Gradually, the accumulated lack of sleep started acting on him as the sleep monster crept up and attacked. He knew clearly that he would not be able to face his older brother and the others like this, but he gave in and fell asleep.

—At that moment.....

[?!]

Suddenly there was a foreboding wind that sent chills down the spine from an unknown place as well as the stink of sulphur everywhere.

Yukio immediately surveyed his surroundings.

The audience were happily listening to the folk songs. The setting was completely peaceful. However, in the eyes of Yukio who was an exorcist, he saw a lot of Coal Tars within the audience and the stage, like a huge black fog.^[17]

[How can this be so sudden... and there are so many?]

Countless Coal Tars dyed the roof black.

Yukio stretched out a single arm, pretending to naturally shoo a Coal Tar from his face and at the same time finding the source of the foreboding wind.

His line of vision reached the stage where there was a strange band waiting.

There were three men with heavy makeup, completely dressed in black, carrying guitars and basses. Their appearance seems to be what was so called Visual Kei.

But—

Yukio quickly checked his program notes.

It did not state anything about a Visual Kei band.

[Is there any Visual Kei bands performing for today's concert? For example, if someone dropped out last minute so they came to replace.....]

He asked the nearby volunteer. This plump middle aged man went to the church every morning to pray, so he knew Yukio.^[18]

[Visual Kei.....?]

The volunteer shook his head on his thick neck.

[No, this time there are no popular bands. This is purely a charity concert with family-oriented bands.]

Exactly.

[Also, this department store does not welcome this kind of band. Tomorrow there's a hero show for the family, which is [[Blue Fighter]] which has been shown last time. Just now I saw the outfit during break, how nostalgic.]

The chatty volunteer started blabbing about inconsequential things. Yukio shushed him twice before focusing on the stage again.

Most probably, they are the source that attracted the large number of Coal Tar.

He observed those three people carefully. The bassist and guitarists did not look abnormal. Although their lips were painted black and had dark eyeshadow, but that was just makeup. But the lead singer obviously did not look human.

He had a pair of pointed big ears, bloodshot eyes emanating a dark glow. A thin long snake-like tongue with crimson tips that seemed blood stained stretched out from a wide ferocious mouth.

(He's definitely possessed by a demon)

[This is bad.] Yukio was speechless.

On the roof, including audience and staff, there were almost a hundred people.

Although he could not guess the demon's reason of blending into the concert, but from what the demon wanted to do, it could potentially causes chaos.

The most critical question is: what if the demon's target was his older brother?

As Satan's son, Rin has not awakened. Once he awakens, there would be people with different motives rushing to him from everywhere.

Yukio hid his anxiety in his heart while nonchalantly leaving his seat to leave.

[I'm sorry, I need to go to the washroom. Please mind the counter for a while.]

[Oh, no problem. There shouldn't be any more people coming, you can go.]

After thanking the smiling volunteer, Yukio left the counter and walked towards the exit of the roof.

Firstly he had to avoid difficult routes.

Then, when Yukio touched the automatic glass doors, a sharp pain coursed through his fingers. On further inspection, it was not just his fingernails that split open, there were also what seemed like warts on his skin, just like the spasms of pain that came with the temptaint.

[Ah, a barrier—]

It was a barrier that could not be easily destroyed. The enemy intends to trap everybody.

He took out his handphone from his jacket to contact the True Cross Knights, but he could not get through as the signal seem to be cut off.

The place has been completely isolated.

[How troublesome.....]

Yukio showed an anxious expression which he rarely did. Unable to contact the exorcists or Shirou, can he alone be able to protect his older brother and everyone else?

Just then, the uproar of the audience sounded from behind.

[?!]

Yukio looked back anxiously, seeing that the band had already went on stage —

[Enjoy the idle tranquillity, ugly and dumb humans.]

The low hoarse voice and the noise from the microphone was very piercing and became a magic music nobody could stand. [What happened?]

[Hey..... isn't the microphone too loud?]

[Hate this..... My ears are aching—]

The audience cannot help but cup their ears and some people stood up to leave.

The demon happily looked at the audience's actions and spoke deeply and hoarsely again: [From now on, I will bring you to our paradise.]

The man's face had his veins bulging and his eyes seemed to be popping out of his eye cavity.

[Towards Gehenna—]

The man showed a cold and chilling smirk.

The other members accompanied his laughter by starting their performance. It was as if balloons burst and skulls were drilled into. The terrified audience and staff screamed continuously.

A second later, the stage lighting shattered, making broken glass fly everywhere. An unexpectedly beautiful glass rain showed on the stage.

The curtain to the nightmare's prelude has begun.



[You bastard. Such an eyesore, get out of my way.]

[Ah...? Moron, I haven't even said anything.]

[Shut up, go and die.]

[You go die instead, trash.]

[What are you saying—]

The frolicking university students suddenly started fighting. The surrounding audience frantically left their seats. The men who tried to stop the fight ended up joining in... just like a chain reaction.

Fighting was not enough; some people even started destroying property.

Audio visual equipment was toppled, seating suffered damage and the stage decorations were smashed to smithereens.

The location descended into absolute chaos in a short time.

Unknowingly, even the guitarists and bassists of the band chucked their instruments away and joined the mob.

Even after losing his musicians, the man still continued singing. In the completely foggy and dark venue, the sinister notes kept reverberating, as if it was a cacophony of screaming singing.

(There are so many people here, how could they all get possessed at the same time... it's impossible.) Something must be behind him, but he had no idea then.

Suddenly, there was a huge figure in front of Yukio who was completely flustered.

[.....] It was the volunteer from just now.

His eyes looked strange... when thinking of that, the opponent already started to pummel chairs and was bellowing at the same time.

[Ugh.....!]

Yukio dodged by a hair's breadth and started shooting. It was a fatal weakness; the volunteer's huge body collapsed and never rose again.

[Too easy.] Yukio thought to himself.

If it was demonic possession, this kind of attack would not induce unconsciousness.

Looking at the rowdy audience, instead of being possessed by demons, they looked more like drug addicts on heavy dosages. They did not enjoy the thrill of destroying and looked like they were controlled by some unknown force.

What happened... Yukio immediately noticed that the voice was still reverberating around the venue.

[A demon that sings to hypnotise people huh.....]

The piercing voice is what made the audience lose control and started the violence.

Demons that use music to hypnotise people appeared many times in history. One of the famous ones were the sea sylphs who sunk ships with their melodious voices that tempted the hearts of people.

(People with pure hearts or strong will should not be that easily affected.....)

From calmly surveying the surroundings, although there were only a few, there were people who tried to protect themselves. They were either children or the elderly who could not escape and can only be frightened by the hell-like place.

[I'm scared..... Grandpa, I'm scared.....]

[It's alright, it's alright—]

As the elderly tried their best to console the children crying into their shoulders, a thug attacked them.

A burly middle aged man grabbed a light tube tightly in his hands.

[Oh no.] Yukio took a step forward.

But in the next moment, he stopped moving.

Because Yukio saw a person wearing a white rabbit mascot costume fiercely beating up the thug to protect the old man and his grandchild.

[Don't attack defenseless old people and children.]

This person is Rin.

[Although I have no clue on what's happening, but if you want to fight, I'm up for it.]

Like this, Rin went into the murderous and violent audience, beating up everyone in his path.

The cute white rabbit mascot now looked strangely barbaric and evil.

Because the koumaken [\[19\]](#)

(It seems that their aim is not Nii-san.)

Despite sighing in relief, the situation did not become better.

Yukio's view left his berserk older brother and went to the stage.

He was very certain that a melody that did not need to pass through the ear drums to reach his brain was carelessly trying to disturb the negative emotions within him.

He forcefully shook his head to get rid of this feeling.

As long as the demon possessing the lead singer was exorcised, stopping the song would let everyone return to normal.

Yukio sped to the counter, taking out his sports bag from under the table. For emergencies, it contained guns, bullets and other tools. But— Exorcists never went into battles alone, usually acting in pairs so that their strengths and weaknesses complement each other according to their abilities. This is just like Yukio and Motege the previous day.

But now there is only one exorcist who was Yukio. Since there was a barrier, backup would not come.

The most critical thing is his older brother's presence. He could not act as an exorcist since his shocked older brother would definitely require a reasonable explanation. If he knew about the existence of demons, it could lead to awakening.

If this happened, he could no longer live as a human.

Not just that, he could even be executed by the Order.

He had to deceive his older brother and stop this quickly.

But how—?

Not being able to reveal his identity as an exorcist was a huge problem that baffled Yukio. At the same time, the venue was in chaos.

Cries of children came from the surroundings.

(Argh..... what should I do?)

Yukio hated how he was hesitating. At this moment, if it was his adopted father—Shirou, what would he do?

At that moment, he suddenly recalled the past moment of sitting on his adopted father's shoulder to watch the hero show.

The solitary and mighty hero whose true self is unknown.

—Tomorrow there will be a family hero show of [Blue Fighter]. Just now I was at the dressing room.....

The volunteer's words just now flashed through his head, giving Yukio a bright idea.

(Oh yeah!)

Yukio clutched his bag and stealthily avoided the chaos until he reached the dressing room next to the stage.

Luckily his older brother who was fighting a few people completely did not notice anything.

Going through the thick backdrop to the dressing room, two department store workers were at the corner hugging each other and shaking nonstop. They were young ladies who had tears in their eyes and broke down once they saw Yukio's cool expression.

[D-, don't come here..... please.....]

[Please keep calm. This violent incident is caused by demons. I am here to stop it.]

In order not to traumatise them further, Yukio tried his best to show a warm smile and then raised his arms.

[I am a Middle Second Class exorcist from the True Cross Order.]

[Ex...cor...cist?]

[Yes.]

Yukio's warm and friendly words reached the hearts of the young ladies.

He reached from his license from his western jacket to assure them. Afterwards, Yukio asked: [I heard that the costume used for tomorrow's Blue Fighter show is here. Where is it?]

[Eh..... costume..... isn't it on the clothes rack.....?]

One of the ladies raised a trembling finger, pointing to somewhere next to the door Yukio had walked into. In a portable clothes rack, the Blue Fighter costume was there as she had said.

Because it was meant for a high school student to wear, there was no problem fitting into the costume. Especially when Yukio is considered tall

among junior high students, so he did not have to worry about the costume being too big.

There was a voice changer next to the mouth, so no matter who spoke in it, it would emit the voice of the Blue Fighter (?) himself. This kind of situation is the best he could hope for since he would not have to fear his older brother finding out about him through his voice.^[20]

However—

(Having to wear this outfit huh.....)

This is a bodysuit made of nylon.

It would be fine in his childhood, but wearing it in this age is too embarrassing.

He would not wear it if he could. Usually he would not wear it no matter what.

But he had no choice this time, it was an emergency.

Taking the costume off from the clothes rack, he said to the workers:

[Excuse me, I have borrowed this costume.]

[Ah.....?]

[Due to some reasons, I need to hide my identity.]

With such a sudden request from Yukio, the two workers forgot their fear and showed surprise instead.

This reaction was expected.

[Please don't worry, I will definitely return it.]

Yukio made a bright smile, attempting to get this done with and said:

[Also, is there any pyrotechnics for tomorrow's show?]

[Ah..... if it's for special effects, there are preparations here.]

There should be such equipment under the stage, he saw them during preparation but they were now blocked by the audience.

[Can it be used now?]

[Eh..... I don't know? Can you use it?]

[I can—but I don't know whether it can be used immediately.] Another younger female worker said with little certainty.

[If the machine is spoiled, it cannot be used..... Anyway let my try.]

Even if there was only a sliver of hope, but it was better than nothing.

[Please do it.] Yukio nodded to her.

[If it can produce smoke, please shoot.]

[Ah, okay.]

The female worker nodded slightly and answered to Yukio's command.

Finally, all the preparations were completed.

Afterwards, it was up to him whether he could go into the role of the Blue Fighter.

No, it should be on how well he can do in an impromptu act.....

Yukio's expression looked like he was facing a troublesome task while he held on to the Blue Fighter costume tightly.



Jumping on the stage, he saw that the chaos in the audience had worsened.

Glass shards of the lighting equipment were scattered on the stage. The man possessed by the demon gazed at the frightened audience, showing a deranged smile.

Yukio stood behind the demon, trying to get rid of the voice surrounding him.

[—This is as far as you go.]

He warned loudly through a loudspeaker in the same voice as the Blue Fighter.

[What are you.....]

[You do not need to know who I am. Return the audience to normal now.]

[Suddenly thwarting my plans, how annoying.]

Although the demon was speaking to Yukio, the singing voice did not stop. Countless mouths started appearing on his body, each one singing sinister melodies. No wonder it did not sound like a single voice.

The demon squinted, examining Yukio.

His gaze paused on the black gun that Yukio was grabbing tightly with his right hand. Seeing the insignia on the gun, the demon fumed with its expression becoming more feral.

[I see..... You are an exorcist..... damn Vatican watchdog.]

The demon spit at his feet and then snarled at Yukio.

[!!!]

In a swift movement, the formless sound transformed into sharp blades and flew towards Yukio.

Yukio dodged to the side and crouched on the stage, pointing his gun at the demon.

[Stop the singing now.]

[You want to give me orders?] The drooling demon twisted its mouth and laughed. [However, I think you will not shoot.]

[Do you want to try?]

The face beneath the mask grinned slightly. Yukio placed his finger on the trigger, yet the demon placed his hand on his chest proudly.

[This person's heart is diseased..... so he could not truly enjoy music. He who could not fulfill his dreams had his heart give into despair after he failed..... This is the darkness that attracted me.]

[.....What?]

[If you shoot, he will end his life on the spot.]

Looking at Yukio's slightly suspicious expression, the demon chuckled. Its deep red tongue stretched out from pale lips.

[You hypocrites will never understand this lamb.]

Yukio raised his gun but did not dare to press the trigger, the demon howled again.

[Damn it.....!]

When hiding from the storm-like barrage of blades, Yukio tried his best to think of a strategy.

(Think fast..... think quickly.)

Of course this could be a lie by the demon. Since olden times, demons always used flowery words to trick humans.

Also, even if the probability of it happening could be zero, it did not mean that the body being possessed could be harmed due to recklessness.

For now he could only follow the original plan which was exorcising the demon out of the possessed body. When the demon loses its vessel from Assiah, shoot holy silver bullets at the body and the job would be done.

This method would avoid harming the possessed body.

However, Yukio was not an Aria and there were no other exorcists at the venue. To exorcise the demon—he had no idea on how to get about it.

Furthermore, the demon in front of him seemed smarter than yesterday's demon so it would not be deceived if Yukio shot blanks at it.

(Damn it. What to do... oh yes—!!)

While dodging the sound blades, Yukio also took out the replacement bullets from his utility belt.

Seemingly fumbling, he reloaded his weapon and shot forward with a smokescreen covering him. Yukio almost fell down..... but he still kept his balance forcefully.

[This is an easy catch.]^[21]

The demon made a pose and looked down on Yukio.

Unconsciously, Yukio was already at the corner of the stage, his right wrist cut by a sound blade with blood slowly dripping.

[What's up? Done with your acts?]

The demon stepped closer and closer.

(Just like this..... come even closer.)

Yukio pretended to show an expression of despair, actually looking forward to the demon approaching. At the same time, there was an empty can flying from the audience, hitting the back of the demon's head squarely.

[G-go Blue Fighter.....!!!]

The child who was trembling uncontrollably with his grandfather while surrounded by thugs was crying out in front of the stage with a flushed face.

That was the child that his older brother just rescued.

Rin who was pummeling a guitarist in the middle of the audience heard the voice and turned around to see.

[Eh..... Blue Fighter.....?]

For a moment, there was eye contact with his older brother.

What was the cause of this? One of them was wearing a white rabbit mascot costume, the other was wearing a whole bodysuit.^[22]

Luckily his older brother did not notice that the person in front of him was his younger brother. But the hero that has appeared at the venue shocked him to the extent that he could not close his mouth.

[This abominable maggot.....]

The demon looked at the empty can that was rolling on the stage, stepped on it forcefully with his foot and threw sound blades at the audience.

[At least before you die, moan in pain and scream in sweet fear.]

[[Stop right now!!!]] Yukio pressed the trigger facing the demon's back. The gunfire made a loud sound. Like it was prepared beforehand, a gust of smoke spread through the audience. Bullets penetrated the man who was possessed by the demon. [No, it can't be..... how is it possible.....] The demon opened both eyes and became stiff due to the pain. After the singing stopped, the mouths all over its body gave a last shrill whine before its death. So the demon left the body of the possessed man. The unconscious man's body fell on the

stage like a marionette with its strings cut. Yukio barely managed to grab his body, looking at the demon who was nearby and holding another gun from his back gun compartment with his left hand. [B-bastard..... You still call yourself an exorcist.....] The demon let out a wail of agony. Yukio gazed at him silently and shot twice. The demon was shot with holy silver bullets all over and shattered in the air. Yukio let the possessed man recline on the stage while expressionlessly staring at the demon's demise. [[It's best if you go to Gehenna alone.]]

[You..... damn hypocrite.....]

The demon said its last words like a curse:

[Exorcist..... you even dare to kill.....]

Hearing this, Yukio chuckled softly under the mask.

[What's so funny?] The demon moaned.

From the magazine at his waist, he took out a similar bullet and said:

[[This isn't holy silver, it's just CCC concentrated holy water.]] [!!] Holy water does not harm humans but is extremely effective against demons. If merely drenched, the effects are limited as it can only stop the enemy's movement. However if the concentration was high enough, there would be bouts of pain. Pretending to shoot, the enemy would think that it was really shot. This holy water bullet was newly designed for unexpected incidents. A few days ago, at the exorcist shop he frequented, the lady boss highly recommended this so he just bought it. He never thought that it would be utilized now. [As a holy person..... you dare..... to deceive demons.....] [[Sorry, I'm a hypocrite.]]

Yukio smiled slightly.

[Go to..... hell.....]

Aiming at the flash of the angrily moaning demon, he loaded a holy silver bullet in his left handed gun. The demon turned into black powdery dust, disappearing into the air.

After the demon was destroyed, the violent audience became quiet.

[Eh—? Just now, why did I.....]

[Why were we fighting.....?]

[Argh..... my head is spinning.....]

[I suddenly felt my blood boil..... and then I can't remember anything.]

[Why was there smoke?]

[How did the venue become a mess?]

From the audience that regained their senses.....

[The Blue Fighter saved us!]

The teenager shouted.

[Come to think of it.....! How about the Blue Fighter?! What happened to him?!]

His older brother's voice also reached his ears.

The smoke surrounding the stage and audience gradually diffused.

— Yukio already hid at the side of the stage way before his older brother noticed anything.



Afterwards, Yukio quickly changed back to his original clothes and took out his finally usable phone to contact the order.

Half an hour later, the order members who reached the location began the cleansing process on the place and the people. The injured victims were brought to hospital for checkups. Most people had superficial wounds and the possessed man's life was not in danger. Because he received a severe mashaou infection, he would be able to see demons for his whole life. What kind of life he would have, nobody knows.

The concert was of course halted.

Because it was a charity concert, almost nobody demanded for a refund.

Maybe it was an effect of demonic control; the audience blamed each other, so nobody blamed the church who was the organizer. It was one of the better things that happened.

Also, just the aftermath and clearing the venue was a pain. When everything

was settled, the brothers were on their way home while the setting sun already dyed the True Cross School Centre red.

[Ah~~ Today was sure a disaster.....]

The older brother who was strolling at the South Cross Store complained constantly, showing exhaustion on his face. His stomach grumbled nonstop in ravenous hunger.

[Anyway, the forceps effect was really scary?]

[It's not forceps, it's subconscious. Forceps are tools.]^[23]

[It's a performance with a powerful effect on the subconscious, making the violence and desire for destruction in people's hearts increase rapidly, causing the disaster.] Yukio explained to his older brother this way. But after the explanation, his older brother's face showed that he did not understand anything at all.

[[Nii-san, sometimes you listen to intense rock music and get excited over it. This is like a more hardcore version.]] Yukio gave a kindergarten level explanation before his older brother finally understood. Rin clapped his hands, exclaiming: [[The forceps effect is so incredible.]] He was full of admiration. Yukio gave a recap to the Order members. Since he was worried about his older brother hearing the part about demons, he asked him to meet at the carpark of the department store to pack the luggage on the van. Although stopping the thugs exhausted him, but the statement of [[If you work hard, there will be sukiyaki tonight]] took effect, so his older brother was now very agreeable.

(If there's no sukiyaki for dinner, it's going to be bad.....)

Thinking of this, Yukio's hairs stood up. If it was stir fry vegetables without meat, the consequence will be beyond imagination.^[24]

[Whether it is potato meat stew or hotpot, please let there be some meat.]

When Yukio was praying for this week's cook, Rin's nose sniffed.

[How fragrant-]

The shopping district was packed with the dinner crowd with warm smells spreading all over. The aroma of roast pork ribs and stew was a torture to

anyone with an empty stomach.

With the aroma assaulting the nose, a subconsciously drooling Rin suddenly went back to reality and asked: [When everyone were fighting, what were you doing? The venue was a mess.]

[!!]

Here it is, he knew the it would be asked.

While anxious about hiding the truth, Yukio answered according to his script.

[Nothing..... Actually I just came back from the toilet, and then it happened..... I was so scared when I reached the glass doors at the roof.]

Although the reason seemed a bit forced, but the older brother who always had the impression that [Yukio = coward & weak] completely did not suspect anything.

[I can't do anything about you.....]

Rin smiled slightly while Yukio unknowingly scratched his cheek.

[I'm really useless.]

[Never mind, even if you were there you won't be able to do anything, at least—]

[He wants to say at least learn from me, right?] Yukio thought to himself.

[Learn something from the Blue Fighter.]

[Eh?]

Yukio gasped.

Seeing Yukio's unusual surprised expression, Rin snickered.

[I saw it.] He said.

[What did you see?]

[Today, the real Blue Fighter came!!]

[!!..... Hahaha.]

Yukio saw his older brother's eyes sparkle like a child and started laughing.

Seeing Yukio laughing nonstop, Rin stared at him, upset.

[What are you laughing for?]

[Please, that's a TV show. How can it be real?]

[You're wrong, it's true! When you were trembling like a coward, he was on the stage! Your aniki saw it with his own eyes.]

[Yeah yeah yeah, if you want to talk in your dreams, do so when you're sleeping.]

[That was no dream! Blue Fighter was really there!! How super cool and awesome!! He seemed to be holding a black gun and moved very fast. Super awesome—]

Rin started to get excited when narrating the situation.

Looking at his older brother busy waving his hands in the air, Yukio grinned beneath his glasses.

(There's no need for you to say it, I know, Nii-san.)

Because Blue Fighter was right in front of his eyes—

[He's super awesome right? He had lots of equipment in his belt. Anyway, he's awesome.]

[You don't say. From the beginning I only heard you say that he was awesome.]

Yukio barely contained his laughter and tried his best to show a [Having an older brother like this is so troublesome] expression.

[It's real.] Feeling that Yukio would never believe it, Rin mumbled.

Suddenly, he said seriously:

[Anyway..... didn't Blue Fighter used to fight with swords?]

[!!]

[When did he switch to guns?]

His casual question made Yukio slightly smile.

At the same time, a familiar monastery uniform could be seen from the

crowd. This week's food in-charge—Maruda was carrying large plastic bags with both hands, looking like he just bought groceries from the supermarker.

Rin stared at the meat boxes peeking out from the plastic bags, his eyes sparkling.

He also saw the green spring onions and roast tofu.

[Sukiyaki?!]

Before he could finish saying it, his older brother jumped nimbly to the side like a cat. Yukio gazed at his back, placing a hand on his chest and sighed, noticing his hand unconsciously.

(Come to think about it.....)

Today, fear did not come like an aftershock.

From a fearful battleground, his left hand did not tremble like before. Yukio raised his left hand to the sky, with the scarlet setting sun shining on it.

— How super cool and awesome!! He seemed to be holding a black gun and moved very fast. Super awesome.....

He seemed to hear his older brother's excited voice.

Yukio suddenly smiled. On the street dyed red by the sunset, he chased his older brother's running silhouette.

Chapter 2: I Want to Dance the Tango with You

● 我想跟你跳探戈



[Oh no...]

(Ah, Izumo is sighing again.)

Paku was observing her good friend who was holding her chin on the table while flipping a textbook with one hand. Her big eyes were not looking at the text, but gaze silently and gloomily out of the window.

So there was something wrong with her.

Freshman of True Cross Academy, former Exorcist course student, Paku Noriko noticed that her good friend, Kamiki Izumo was not her usual self.

Firstly, she was lethargic.

She always had an expression as if being deep in thought and never paid attention even if Paku spoke to her. It did not seem that she was concentrating on her studies.

Being hardworking was her strength, saying that she hated those who showed weakness in front of others, always awe-inspiring and definitely not someone who would show this kind of clearly depressed expression.

When the dismissal bell rang, Paku went to her seat.

[Izumo, class is over?]

After she shouted, Izumo came to her senses with difficulty and hurriedly closed her textbooks.

[I know, just that... during lesson just now, there was something I didn't know... I wasn't daydreaming and not hear the bell, okay.]

Izumo's tone was a little angry. Of course she was not really angry. It was just her wanting to hide her embarrassment. Paku liked the playfully arrogant Izumo a lot although she still felt that she could be a bit more honest.

Like this, Izumo would become even more cute.

In reality, she had a nice countenance and her head of pencil-straight long black hair made Paku envy her immensely. Her cute shapely eyebrows suited her a lot, just like a princess from The Tale of Genji. But every time she said this, Izumo would be angered, so it was best that Paku kept it to herself.

[We'll go get lunch. Do you want to eat at the cafeteria or buy bread from the canteen to eat on the field?]

[This...] Izumo made a thinking expression. [To the co-op then.] She answered as she stood up. The dining hall of True Cross Academy had all sorts of cuisine from French to Italian. Although the food was delectable, but the lunch set at the exorbitantly high price of 1800 yen and above was the same price of lunch at a slightly more high class hotel. [\[25\]](#)

True Cross Academy is a so-called elite school, but not all the students were from rich families. In order to save money, students buy bread and rice balls from the canteen to eat on the fields or benches near the high school compound. Quite a number of students did that.

Izumo and Paku would occasionally save money on food to buy things for their common interest— novels although they liked different genres. Izumo liked to read romance novels while Paku liked to read classics.

[I say, Izumo, is exorcist cram school hard on you?]

When Izumo stuffed her wallet into her colourful heart-shaped handbag, the two of them walked out of the classroom while Paku asked her.

The students all went for lunch while groups sat together to chitchat to spend their happy lunch time.

[You passed the Exwire exam right? Last time I heard it from Shima and the others, so you've started your missions?]

—A few months again, she was also enrolled in the exorcist course. As long as one had the [key], they could go to anywhere by opening the door, how amazing.

Paku originally lived a peaceful life which had nothing to do with the exorcists, but only enrolled with Izumo's persuasion.

But she did not have the strong will to become an exorcist and could not keep up with the exorcist course homework. After a certain incident, she realised that she was not part of this world and decided to quit. But this did not ruin her friendship with Izumo, or maybe there were some initial grudges which were resolved by now.

So if Izumo had any worries, it must be from the exorcist course which Paku could not understand. The probability was high. After hearing what Paku said, Izumo trembled a little before immediately spreading her shoulder-length hair.

[...H-how's that possible, I have the bloodline of witches, so that kind of task is so simple that I'm yawning. Really, Paku! Stay further from that flirty guy! You're innocent, it's better not to be close to him... Anyway, if that idiot dares to go near you, I'll chase him away.]

This is more like the usual Izumo.

The reason was definitely the exorcist course. But it did not seem like not being able to catch up with schoolwork or the missions being too difficult.

Paku, who did not understand, suddenly had inspiration and asked:

[You couldn't get along with Moriyama-san?]

Moriyama Shiemi is a student of the exorcist course and also a quiet girl who loved flora and fauna. Although she was a bit introverted and blur, Paku felt that she was a good girl who was sometimes unexpectedly clam and brave. When Paku was attacked by a ghoul, it was Shiemi who used aloe to cover the infected part.

However, for some reason, Izumo excluded her.

[Ah? ...What's there to talk about this, I never got along with that weird woman. Why would I worry about ehr?]

Looks like that guess was wrong.

(And then.....)

Paku was happy that when she left the exorcist course, Izumo seemed to have changed. When she talked about Shiemi, her tone was not as cold as before.

(I see, you're working very hard, Izumo.)

Paku looked at her good friend who was walking at her side, feeling like a mother bird seeing her baby bird leave her nest.

[Then it's over someone else? Ah! Izumo! Don't tell me you—]

[I-I what?]

Paku's eyes sparkled excitedly. Oh yes, why did I not think of this immediately? About a high school girl's worries, of course it is...

[You have someone you like? In the exorcist course!]

Putting a thumbs up, Paku was delighted and made an expression of [I guessed it.]. She thought that it was the correct answer, but Izumo still had an unhappy expression.

[Huh?! Don't talk rubbish, Paku! How do you want me to like that bunch of idiots?! If I liked them, I might as well like closterium, at least it can photosynthesise!]

Hmm... closterium?^[26]

Was she hiding her embarrassment, or was she really angry? It was really hard to tell.

But you're too venomous.

(I think they're better than closterium.)

Paku felt injustice for those four people who were worth less than closterium.

Okumura Rin, Suguro Ryuuji, Shima Renzou, Miwa Konekomaru— Although she had known them for less than a month, but the boys of the exorcist course were nice to get along with, especially when Okumura-san's smile was cute and she thought he was handsome. His twin younger brother, Okumura-sensei was also attractive, but no matter how one looked, their relationship should be changed... Forget it, this is not the point.

(Then what was Izumo worrying about?)

In the end, it was still unknown.

One thing which was for sure was that even if Paku bluntly asked her [What are you worrying about?], Izumo would not comply and confess. Her awkward personality was one of Izumo's charms, but it would be better if she could be more direct.

When the two of them walked out of the school gates, Izumo suddenly stopped in her footsteps.

Paku looked at the side of Izumo's face in wonder, seeing that Izumo's gaze went beyond the clock tower of the school compound and focused on the middle of the big staircase at the back.

In front of that, one of the the exorcist course students who was just mentioned, Okumura Rin, had appeared.

This boy who was called Rin, not only he had a special presence, and he always brought along a long sword in a bag, so he could be recognised from far away.

(Eh? So it was Okumura-san.....)

Paku's heart skipped a beat.

Upon closer inspection, Izumo's gaze was not on him, but something behind him which was black and soft.

(Cat.....?)

—Why? Why was there a cat in school?

And its tail was even forked. Although its overall colour was black, but its toes and stomach was snow white and only the area around its mouth was a dirty grey. It was as cute as a puppet.

It was very clingy to Rin. When it ran about, it even went to his legs to nuzzle him. Even one who did not like cats would have their heart melted by that sight.

(I know. Because of it.....)

Paku finally understood why her friend was sighing.

The secret that Kamiki Izumo was trying so hard to hide was that she was a [girl who was obsessed with cute things].



[Oh~~ Its name is Kuro, Okumura-san's cat.]

On the cloudy day, Paku sat on the dense field, speaking while biting on her mixed sandwich.

Izumo, who was eating an egg sandwich, corrected her:

[It's not a cat, it's a Cat Sidhe.]

According to what Izumo had said, a cat sidhe is a demon which possesses cats. In Japan, the cat sidhes had forked tails. Although they were different from the Byakko that Izumo summons, but most cat sidhes coexist with humans by making contracts.

(Rumour has it that some cat sidhes would pretend to be ordinary cats to find owners to keep them. How cute.) And after Kuro contracted with Rin, it also became his familiar.

[Making a demon his familiar.] To Paku, it was something of another world.
[Okumura-san is amazing~~]

Seeing Paku's honest admiration, Izumo gave a snort of contempt and said:
[This is nothing, who knows how did that idiot manage to convince Kuro to become his familiar?]

[Is that so?]

[Yes.]

[But, Kuro is so cute.]

[Exactly... is it?]

Izumo excitedly spoke louder, but quickly lowered her tone to give the impression of [not interested]. Paku who found it amusing could not stop sniggering.

[What do cat sidhes eat?]

[Older cat sidhes are closer to humans. Kuro seems to like to eat meat. It's definitely because its owner keeps talking about [sukiyaki].]

Paku thought of that time halfway during lesson when Rin subconsciously shouted [sukiyaki!]. [No wonder.] thought Paku.

However, Izumo's observations were really detailed. Of course the target was not Okumura Rin. Instead, this was referring to Kuro.

[Are cat sidhes strong?]

[Every cat sidhe is different. Kuro must be very weak. Look at how cute he is—

cough— that skinny appearance.]

[Do cat sidhes take afternoon napes like normal cats?]

[It should be so? Kuro has a place it likes to sleep at. Once, I saw him sleep at the sunny space at the back of library, huddled into a bunch taking a [sleepy nap]—]

Closing her eyes, Izumo snapped back and said:

[...Nah, but this has nothing to do with me.]

Izumo held her reddening face while intensely sucking on her strawberry au lait from the juice box.

(Izumo is very cute.)

Accidentally speaking like a child, she must have felt very embarrassed.^[27]

Almost about to laugh out loud, Paku turned her back against Izumo to prevent herself from laughing as she pretended to bit the sandwich in her hands.

—In the next moment, the just mentioned Kuro was spotted in Paku's sight.

[Ah, it's Kuro.]

[Where?!]

Paku's casual remark made Izumo reply quickly. She followed Paku's review to scan the area quickly.

Afterwards, she found her reaction so embarrassing that she coughed.

[...It's really him.]

She nonchalantly said this, but the tips of her ears were becoming red. Once again, Paku tried her best to restrain her laughter.

Kuro was not a person. It came from where the Okumura twins were in the distance. The younger brother, Yukio was sitting on a bench and was surrounded by girls while the older brother, Rin was lying down on the field. Kuro was jumping near his feet and chasing butterflies.

Almost catching a butterfly, he fell heavily on the field.

Seeing that, Izumo quietly exclaimed [Ah...]. She stretched out her hands a little only to stop halfway, as if like a mother who was looking over her child who had just started to learn how to talk.

[I say, Izumo, we can ask Okumura-kun to let us cuddle Kuro for a while?]

Paku whispered a suggestion at Izumo's ear.

[N-no need to... I-I'm not interested.]

Izumo trembled a bit, with her forceful voice and expression showing much restraint.

(Hmm— this isn't working...)

Paku looked at her still stubborn friend while giving a pained smile, and suggested again: [Then I'll ask him to let me cuddle it.]

Paku purposely tried to provoke her.

In the end, Izumo sounded an [Eh...]. Her heart was obvious wavering and her betrayed expression was so adorable.

Sorry, Izumo, but you need to be more honest.

[Wait for a while, I'll be back soon.]

After saying that, Izumo went towards the field where Rin and Kuro was.

Kuro who was still chasing after butterflies, raised his head to look at Paku with its mouth slightly agape.

It meowed to Rin, as if asking: [Who is she?]

Rin still remembered his former classmate— Paku.

[Yo, long time no see, how are you?]

Rin bent forward slightly to ask about her injury from some time ago. Okumura-kun looked like a delinquent, but he was actually a very gentle person, so Kuro was clingy to him.

Paku smiled and answered:

[Mmm, I'm alright. This cat sidhe is Okumura-kun's familiar?]

[Yeah, he's called [Kuro].]

[It's amazing to have your own familiar.] Rin heard Paku's praise and showed a delighted expression. Looks like he was completely opposite from Izumo as his feelings were all showed on his face.

[Can I cuddle him?]

[Oh, sure.]

Rin nodded graciously. With both hands, Paku held Kuro and it docilely let her hug it in her chest. She heard that Kuro was a demon and due to the [ghoul] incident in the past, Paku was quite nervous. But other than the forked tail, he was actually the same as ordinary cats. He felt so warm and his thick fur reflected some sunlight. There was also some kind of alcohol smell on him.

Paku tilted her head confusedly.

[There's the smell of alcohol...]

[Ah, this guy loves drinking catnip wine most.]

[Catnip wine? Not sukiyaki?]

[? Does everyone like to eat sukiyaki?]

Rin answered without understanding what was said. In the next moment, he was so terrified that his face turned green, looking as if he had seen a ghost.

[W-what happened? Okumura-kun.]

Paku asked curiously as she saw Rin raised a trembling finger towards the area behind Paku.

[F-for some reason, Bushy-brows seems very angry...]

[Bushy-brows?]

For a moment, Paku's made an confused expression before noticing that he was referring to Izumo.

[Sometimes boys can give really weird nicknames.] While Paku thought, behind her, there was someone going [Oh.....]

She was indeed looking here.

Rather than saying looking, she was staring intently.

Without blinking, both of her eyes were glaring.

That glare could kill.

[What happened? She looks like she's always staring at us... how scary!]

Even Rin felt afraid. If this continued, Kuro would be scared too.

Paku fumbled and quickly carried Kuro while walking towards Izumo.

[You see~~ Izumo, Kuro is so cute and fluffy~~]

Izumo's expression became fiercer as she kept silent with her lips pursed shut. But Paku knew that she was resisting the urge to shout out loud.

Her two hands were already prepared to cuddle Kuro.

Just a little bit more. In front of Izumo, Paku whispered to Kuro's big ears [Kuro, she's Izumo.] As a result, Kuro whose head which was at Paku's shoulder turned his head slightly.

But once it noticed that the person in front was Izumo, Kuro who was still docile just now quickly struggled against Paku's arms and escaped from the spot as quickly as a rabbit.

[? Ku-kuro...?]

Paku was stunned at the sudden development and kept viewing the direction Kuro escaped to. After gaining composure, she turned around nervously and faced her good friend.

[Hahaha... Kuro ran away? Maybe there's something fun somewhere— I'm joking.]

[.....]

[Izumo?]

[—Let's go, Paku, lunch is ending soon.]

image

Izumo turned to leave.

Paku thought that she would be very upset due to this, but surprisingly, Izumo's face did not change. But her lips were still pursed tightly and her hands

grabbing the end of her skirt were trembling, making Paku notice about her good friend's current mood.

(Izumo is really.....)

Up until now, she was still so tough.

The more she pretended to appear that nothing happened, the more Paku sympathised with her.



(Argh~~ I scared Kuro away again.)

The library of the True Cross Academy high school section had a peaceful atmosphere, in which Kamiki Izumo sighed loudly and dejectedly.

Actually, she had tried to get closer to Kuro a few times when Okumura Rin was not around. But he always ran away. Yesterday, she even took cat toys to him, but it was still a failure.

She had seen her classmate Konekomaru play with Kuro happily, maybe it was because Kuro hated her.

Thinking of that, Izumo looked like a deflated balloon.

But on the surface, she was still the strong Izumo. Even if she was depressed inside, but as she did not want anyone to notice, she exerted force on her stomach. However, it caused an opposite effect to happen and made many wrinkles appear on her forehead.

Scowling, she walked into the library while everyone else scurried away in fright when they saw her. This added fuel to the fire of her already bad mood.

(What! Everyone is this scared... am I that scary?)

Izumo raised her shoulders and walked furiously before suddenly stopping in front of a certain bookshelf.

Oh yes. Not only something saddening happened, there was something bigger gained.

(Paku is... really understanding.)

[Thank you, I will work hard.] In her heart, Izumo thanked her best friend and

at the same time, find her target from the categorised books.

[Ah! Yes, it's this one, this book—]

Izumo could not help but smile as she tip-toed to retrieve a book from the uppermost shelf.

The name of the book is...

[[You can do it at home! How to brew delicious catnip wine]

Reading a book in order to make the catnip wine Kuro likes most, then getting close while feeding him... this is her plan.

—At that moment

[Kamiki-san, you're also borrowing books]

[?!]

A soft voice sounded behind Izumo. Shocked, she clutched the book in front of her before turning around. The person behind her was Okumura Yukio. Although his expression was as gentle as usual, but his breathing seemed quite quick and his hair was also disheveled. It was probably due to trying to avoid the girls who were chasing him, so he had to run in the school campus.

[Oh, [How to brew catnip wine]... isn't it?]

Seeing the title of the book in Izumo's hands, Yukio made an incredulous expression.

Izumo started becoming nervous.

This was not a book that a high school girl would usually borrow, of course Yukio would be surprised.

Then this teacher seemed to be shady— no, very astute. [Could he have noticed that I was going to tame Kuro...] Izumo's heart started to beat quickly, and.....

[Homework for Home Economics? Cookery practice seems to have so much variety these days. I thought it was usually something like mashed potato salad or fried vegetables.]

Izumo looked at Yukio who smiled as he spoke and gave a sigh of relief. It

looks like her worries were unfounded.

[Eh... Ah, it's not. Actually it's because I heard that cats love catnip wine, so I borrowed it for my research on cats.]

Izumo controlled her wavering heart and came up with a lie suddenly. This way, it was not completely a lie and there would be no need to be so nervous.

[Nii-san- no, you heard it from Okumura-kun? It's probably only just our Kuro... but cats do actually like catnip so you're not wrong...]

[Do all cats like catnip wine?] Yukio put his hand on his chin to ponder seriously as he smiled again and said: [No matter what, liking to read is a good thing. How I wish that Nii-san could eat—]

[—eat some of your saliva and learn well...] He felt that this would not be respectful to a girl, so he changed it to: [How I wish that Nii-san could learn from Kamiki-san]

Having successfully bluffed her way through, Izumo put down the weight that was nagging at her. She saw the chance and used a casual tone to ask: [Okumura-sensei, where can I find catnip?]

Yukio thought for a while.

[I remember that the Academy's greenhouse has a catnip tree, but it is not the harvest season now. Although it blooms in summer, but to be able to collect the fruits used in brewing wine, you would have to wait until October.]

[October... huh.]

Izumo could not help but be disappointed. Seeing her desolate expression, Yukio smiled and said: [Oh yes, how about asking Moriyama-san?]

[Huh?] Upon hearing the name of someone she did not like, Izumo frowned.

[Moriyama...-san, right?]

Yukio did not take note of her expression and continued smiling:

[Moriyama-san's Green Man should be able to summon any plant at any time.]

[—Usually I'd rather die than ask you for a favour, but I have no choice but to ask for your assistance.]

With an attitude which was completely unlike of a person making a request, Izumo said these words arrogantly.

She wanted catnip, but she did not want to owe that person anything. After a debate with herself, in the end she asked to meet Moriyama Shiemi at the corridor during a break at exorcist class. After finding many excuses and showing a fierce— actually, Izumo's face was only very red as she made the request of [Can you give me some catnip?]

[Eh...C-catnip?]

Shiemi was extremely nervous because Izumo suddenly wanted to talk to her. So her face became even redder than Izumo's and her attitude was more timid than usual.

[I heard Okumura-sensei say that now would be too early, but you can get it. Or why would I lower my head to you?]

Although she was very afraid of being rejected, but every time she saw her, Izumo always could not help but criticise her. Shiemi completely did not mind Izumo's attitude. She clutched her burning face with her hands and she listened seriously.

[I don't know much, but Kamiki-san, you need it, right?]

[Y-yeah.]

[Let me go home and check!] Shiemi answered loudly. [You'll have to wait for me, Kamiki-san.]

Looking at the smiling Shiemi, a huge question mark appeared on Izumo's face.

[Nah... you don't need to take all that trouble. Just use your Green Man to make it...]

Shiemi was of the same Meister type as Izumo. She can summon a small finger puppet sized Green Man which she named Nii-chan. He was always put on her shoulder and she showered him with a lot of love.

Green Men are the kin of the [Earth King] Amaimon. He can grow plants from his body regardless of season. A gentle natured demon, he would climb Shiemi's hair and make [nii~ nii~] sounds as well as cling on her face lovingly. Despite his cute appearance, when his Meister was in danger, he can grow enormous trunks to form a shield and produce a lot of aloe which can get rid of spirit wounds [28]

Izumo explained excitedly as she pointed to the Green Man. In the end, Shiemi made a confused expression.

[Eh... But you want [tabi], right? I don't know what kind of tabi is [matatabi], because Nii-chan can only grow plants.] [29]

[Huh? Tabi...?]

[Sorry, Kamiki-san. I'll go home and ask Mum and find one for you.] Shiemi said while apologising.

Upon hearing this, Izumo was stunned to the extent of almost laughing, so she quickly turned her back against Shiemi.

(T-This person... Thinking that matatabi is a type of [tabi]...)

Anyway, what kind of tabi is a matatabi? Izumo tried her best to resist the urge to laugh loudly.

[Hmm.....]

Shiemi heard Izumo's leaked laughing and looked at her face quizzically.

[What happened, Kamiki-san?]

[I-I'm alright!! Anyway, matatabi is not a tabi... it's a small white flower that blooms during summer. I want its fruits.]

Holding her reddening ears, Izumo pretended to be angry and started to gesticulate to Shiemi to explain, and...

[Ah!]

Shiemi who paid attention to the explanation, suddenly showed a smile that was as bright as a blooming flower.

[The catnip you're talking about, are you referring to [Natsu-chan]?] [30]

{What?}

[Who's that?!] When Izumo wanted to retort, she suddenly remembered that Shiemi called aloe as [Sankyuu-san].^[31]

(Oh yes, this person seems to give nicknames to plants...)

She remembered that because of this, Shiemi only got 41 marks for her demon herbology test which should have been her best subject before being corrected by Yukio.

[Nii-chan, make some of Natsu-chan's fruits!]

Shiemi smiled as she ordered Nii-chan.

The tiny Green Man heard its name called by the meister he loved most.

[Nii—!]

He answered and jumped down from Shiemi's shoulder before growing a lot of catnip from its expanding stomach. The heads of the branches were abundant with ripe fruits needed for brewing catnip wine.

[For you, Kamiki-san.]

Shiemi felt very happy and gave the mountainous pile of catnip fruits to Izumo.

After struggling with her heart, Izumo quickly said:

[That... I'll accept it...]

Then she whispered with a voice as soft as a mosquito: [Th-thank you.]

As she said that, she hurriedly turned her fully red face away—



—That night.

After dinner, Izumo showered quickly. She gained the warden's permission to switch on the dormitory kitchen lights. The kitchen of the new student dormitory was worlds apart compared to that of the old dormitory. The wide and spacious room was full of the latest kitchen equipment and large refrigerators.

[I have the catnip, so let's get started.]

Eager, Izumo tied her hair into a high ponytail, put on an apron filled with pink polka dots and fasten the strings.

She put the jars, rock sugar and other ingredients to prepare catnip wine at the kitchen counter.

Lastly, she placed the many catnip fruits that Shiemi gave her into the mixing bowl heavily.

Everything had been disinfected.

[There should be no problem. And then... hmm...]

She flipped the book she borrowed with one hand.

The book wrote: [Pour concentrated wine into the bottle with rock sugar. Let it soak for 3 to 6 months.]

If not soaked for long enough, the wine will taste quite bitter.

[Ah? I can't wait for half a year... If I pour in more rock sugar, maybe it will only need 3 days?]

After discussing with herself, she nodded and said: [Only the wine is left.]

[Did it say white wine? Or was it brandy? It seems that not any wine can do...]

Izumo searched the silvery white industrial refrigerator. Besides many types of condiments, there were also a lot of cooking wine. However, even if there was so much that she could not finish using, she could not use cooking wine. Since she was still underage, although it was not for her to drink... she could not buy wine by herself.

At first, she thought this was just a problem after getting the catnip wine. She never thought that it would be solved this easily.

By summoning her Byakko, they can make god's wine.

Taking a piece of paper with a drawn magic circle from her chest, she stained it with her blood.

[Gods of harvest, listen to my command—]

As she sang the summoning aria halfway, Izumo suddenly felt uneasy.

Although it was not an ordinary cat, but can Kuro who is so small (Note: [I am already 120 years old] says Kuro) drink wine?

[Exactly. Saying that he likes to drink catnip wine. Which idiot would feed this kind of thing to a kitten!! (Note: Izumo's misunderstanding)]

Izumo did not know that the first person who fed Kuro catnip wine was actually Rin's late adoptive father— Shirou, so she put all the blame on Rin.

But to make Kuro like her, she needed catnip wine no matter what.

Is there something without alcohol which can replace it...

Izumo looked at the clock above the sink, it was already over 7.05 pm.

As she followed things by the book, she was reluctant to go out at night. But according to the dormitory rules, students can freely enter and exit the dormitory before 8pm.

Izumo took off her apron, carried only her bunny shaped coin purse and walked out of the dormitory.

[—Only you would dare to buy this kind of thing, the cashier is a female worker.]

Suguro made a disgusted expression while talking to Shima. Because this dear friend just bought a raunchy photobook in a store within the school grounds.

Shima clutched his plastic bag filled with his battle drops and smiled proudly.

[Kekeke... [Even if a girl stood at the counter, I still dare to buy porn confidently] This is one of my techniques, it's nothing.]

[What's good about it, you monk who doesn't follow the teachings... So when we were younger, everyone called you the [pervert devil].]

[Ah— don't mention it! Young master! That was my dark past!! After high school, I want to go on the higher road!]

Shima took a deep breath and said: [Luckily this was not heard by Izumo or Moriyama-san.]

[Even so, don't but it anyway.]

Suguro made a condescending expression while scolding.

Beside them, Konekomaru was about to exit the bookstore from its automatic doors.

[Eh, isn't that Kamiki-san?]

He pointed into the distance.

On closer inspection, it was indeed Kamiki Izumo who was carrying supermarket plastic bags in her hands. Her looking left and right with her nervous expression looked very suspicious.

[It's really Izumo.]

Shima hid the raunchy photobook that he just bought behind his back and smiled: [Your so cute just after showering~~≡]

[How do you know she just showered... you're totally a pervert demon.]

Suguro made a nauseous expression while retorting before turning his head to look at Izumo.

[By the way, what is Bushy-brows doing so late at night?]

[She seems to be going back from the supermarket.]

Konekomaru noticed that Izumo's hands had a bag that was printed with [True Cross Supermarket]. After Suguro had seen it, he furrowed his brows.

[What's that... it seems to say [beer].]

[It says [children's beer].] Konekomaru answered.

Because the plastic bag was half transparent, so with a closer look, one could see what was in the bag.

[Then there's fish jerky and... champagne???)

Konekomaru tilted his crew cut head and said: [How strange.]

[What is she buying all these for?] Suguro also could not get it.

[Fish jerky is garnishing. She wants to drink children's beer and champagne to get more drunk. Izumo is really too cute~~]

Shima grinned while moving his body around.

[These three things added together will only make one's breath fishy and smelly.] Konekomaru explained with a pained laugh.

And that surreptitious look was completely different from her usual self.

Looking at her silhouette, Konekomaru tilted his head again and said: [Kamiki-san, what happened to her...?]

On the other side, Izumo did not know that she had been seen by three classmates and hurried back to the dormitory kitchen.

She was initially worried that she would be seen by others. As she went closer to the dormitory, the weight on her heart was slowly put down.

During a Christmas party in elementary school, Izumo had drunk children's beer mixed with champagne. Besides being alcohol-free, it was also sweet and tasty. Mixing it evenly like a cocktail along with soaking the catnip, Kuro would definitely love this taste. And she also bought fish jerky which cats love most as a secret garnish.

If he liked this [Izumo Special Catnip Wine], their feelings will surely develop.

The sweet image of herself and Kuro kept showing in Izumo's mind.

Countless delusions made Izumo tremble excitedly.

(Wait for me, Kuro ≡)

Izumo ran the last stretch back to the dormitory.

—Afternoon, three days later.

Izumo went to Kuro's favourite afternoon nap spot, the sheltered area facing the sun behind the library, where Kuro was asleep. His snow white belly was rising and falling non-stop while Izumo quickly held her mouth to keep silent.

[What if he runs away again?]

(No problem, because I came prepared today...)

She encouraged herself. Ensuring that nobody else was around, she softly spoke to Kuro using baby talk.

[Kuro~~ Are you napping?]

Hearing sounds, Kuro blearily went [Meow?] and looked around. At the moment he saw Izumo's face, his hairs started to stand and wanted to run away.

Izumo quickly called him: [Ah~~ Wait, Kuro, today I brought catnip wine...!]

Izumo shook the tumbler which made splashing sounds.

Seemingly attracted by the sound, Kuro walked towards Izumo's feet. Although he was confused, he still liked his lips. Seeing Kuro, Izumo's heart could not help but tighten. She squatted at the spot and poured the Izumo Special Catnip Wine into the tumbler cap.

[Come~~ Kuro, drink more of it.] She said while putting the tumbler cap in front of Kuro. Delighted, Kuro shook its forked tail and lowered his head towards the tumbler cap.

Meow~~ Then he licked the wine with his tongue... Then—

[Izumo Special Catnip Wine] was mixed with a unique pungent smell along with a sticky cloudy extra sweet taste. This indescribable taste made Kuro faint immediately. From then onwards, he was even more afraid of Izumo.

[I-Izumo... you need to recover?]

[...It's nothing, I'm alright, Paku.]

[But y-your eyes look devoid of life? And your eyebags look serious/]

[Ah... don't mind it... I was just spending the night reading...]

[Izumo—]

Even with her good friend Paku worrying for her, Kamiki Izumo's depressed sighs did not end.

Chapter 3: Troubled Monk

● 煩惱和尚



Karma— meaning that actions lead to consequences is a Buddhist philosophy.

This is Suguro Ryuuji’s favourite line.

Due to it, he had been always training himself day and night.



[You’re early as usual this morning.]

[Good morning.]

Suguro who jogged every morning, was greeted kindly on his way by a woman who was walking her dog. True Cross Academy was like a giant city. Not only all the school facilities were in one place, the necessary commercial and entertainment amenities for teachers and students were also present.

This woman was also one of the people working at these facilities.

Initially, Suguro’s fierce gaze, the seven earrings on his ears and strange hairstyle with a golden streak, had scared her. However, after meeting him every morning during her stroll, she gradually got to know him. Even her dog, would wag its tail happily at the sight of him.^[32]

[How many kilometres are you running today?]

[Five kilometres.]

[Running five kilometres huh.]

[I tried many times and I think that running five kilometres is the best.]

[How amazing. All the best!]

[Thank you.]

Acknowledging politely, Suguro continued his jog. That woman he was familiar with waved to him. When Suguro turned right, barking could be heard.

(The season of joy is coming...)

The sakura at True Cross Academy had fell and it was now a patch of fresh greenery.

This season was best for jogging as one would not need to wear a jacket. The slight wind that met his face felt comfortable. While he was running, it was as if

he was in a carefree meditation state. Five kilometres was over in while. Although sometimes he was still not satisfied, but the main duty of a student is to study. Thinking about how he had to go for exorcist classes later, it was best that he maintain an optimum level of tiredness.

(Those two should come out to jog too.)

When he first started jogging, he also invited his best friends— Shima and Konekomaru.

Konekomaru rejected with a face full of guilt and Shima shouted once he heard that he would have to wake up earlier than usual.

[You're totally a pervert. Only a pervert would do this!]

He was the type that would rush into school one second before being late with toast in his mouth.

(How is this perverted.)

To Suguro, it was an unusual pleasant time in a day.

If it was raining, he would use the treadmill in the school's gym. But actual running felt the best. The gym was better to train muscles. He could achieve the same carefree state this way.

During the holidays, he would first completely clean his dormitory room before jogging and training for two hours and then think deeply during meditation.

This was the most carefree way that Suguro spent his holidays.

Towards Suguro who trained hard, Shima teasingly said:

[Because of this, so young master could not find a girlfriend.]

[You should enjoy youth more. The beauties of True Cross Academy are top-notch!]

[How annoying.] thought Suguro.

(What kind of crap is that... you don't even have a girlfriend yourself.) Suguro had an ambition. Which was to defeat Satan and rebuild the temple at his old home.

For that, he had to do his best to become an outstanding exorcist. His goal for now is to achieve the titles of Dragoon and Aria.

He had no time and mood to fall in love.

Suguro listened to fast-paced Western classical music from his j-Pod and went into his carefree state as he quickened his pace to finish the last two kilometres. Including the time he chatted with the woman, the total time taken— thirteen minutes and seventeen seconds— was not too good.

[Morning jogging indeed feels great...]

He used the towel he hung on his neck to wipe the sweat that was flowing nonstop.

Immersed in the pleasant feeling of tiredness and accomplishment, he felt that in the shrubs nearby, there was a burning gaze directed to him.

When he returned to the boys' dormitory of True Cross Academy, the students who had just woken up had already made a ruckus throughout.

Suguro walked to the showers to wash the sweat from jogging. The warm water from the showerhead made his tense muscles feel relaxed while Suguro quickly washed his hair and body.

After showering, he styled his hair at the sink before going to the cafeteria for breakfast and going to school. Revision and preparation was already done and finished the night before.

[The weather is wonderful today.]

On the way to school, he took a deep breath of fresh air and gazed at the azure sunny sky— Until now, in his daily life, abstinence and productivity was the usual.

And then.....

[.....]

When he opened his shoe locker in his normal class, Suguro stood in place dumbfounded. After blinking a few times, closing his shoe locker, taking a deep breath and opening his shoe locker again, there was still a strange thing on top of his slippers.

That was a pink envelope.

On it, [To Suguro Ryuuji] was written in small and neat writing.

The object gently placed in the shoe locker seemed to be what a girl in love would send to a boy— No, it was also often sent from boys to girls...

[This... This is...a I-love...]

A love letter.

When this phrase appeared in his mind, Suguro's serious expression instantly turned into a blush.

[!!]

He immediately shut his shoe locker— At that moment...

[...Young master, I saw it.]

[?!!]

The voice which seemed to come from the floor made Suguro turn pale. Turning around, he saw Shima standing behind him. [Wh-why are... you here so early.]

It was now 8.03 am. By the way, class starts at 8.30, so it could be understood if it was Konekomaru who was conscientious, but for the habitually late Shima to reach school so early...

When Suguro speculated whether Shima was there for supplementary lessons or being summoned by the teacher...

[Today's first period is Matsuno's modern literature, so I asked Konekomaru to wake me up— I never thought I'd see such a shocking thing happen.]

Keke... Shima put on an act as he laughed.

He only tried so hard to wake up early to look at the pretty female teacher. This reason seemed like what Shima would do.

But why did it have to be today...

Afterwards, Konekomaru appeared from behind Shima.

[—Good morning, young master.]

He was not seen previously as Shima was blocking him.

[You, you two.]

Suguro drank some water before showing an anxious and tense expression while asking his two childhood playmates: [...Did you see that just now?]

[N-no. Just a little, haven't seen it clearly.]

[I saw everything clearly.]

Konekomaru was concerned about Suguro who was wavering while Shima did the exact opposite.

[...Shima.] Konekomaru said worriedly.

Totally not sensing the tension, Shima stared at them.

[A cute pink envelope, small girly writing and definitely a slight wood lotus smell, this is a love letter.] He shouted loudly.

[Wh-why! Why is it not me, and young master. There is no god or buddha in this world...!!]

Shima sighed loudly to the heavens. It seemed that he was going to shout and make a mess in the corridor.

Hearing the noise outside, the students around turned their heads.

[What happened? Why the noise?]

[Who knows... Something about a love letter?]

[Eh? Love letter? Who wrote it?]

The whispers of girls could be heard slightly. If this continued, he would have no face to show.

[Shut up! Shima! You're disturbing the others!]

Suguro quickly made Shima keep quiet.

[Why would any girl like this kind of pervert with a muscle fetish... It doesn't make any sense...!]

[You're so noisy!!]

At least, Suguro struck the back of Shima's head to make him shut up.

[—It's not anything big. Why make so much noise. Control yourself.]

After saying that, Suguro went into the classroom.

However, he realised that he was still barefoot when he walked halfway. He ended up coming back to wear his shoes with his face all red.

Shima rubbed the spot where Suguro struck him while laughing at the sight of Suguro.

[You say that, yet your heart is wavering, isn't it?]

He said softly to Konekomaru.

And then...

[How...]

Suguro threatened him to shut up under his breath as he wore his slippers.

In the next moment, he put the love letter in his school bag at a speed which was faster than the eye could see. Not just Shima, even Konekomaru had noticed. But they were not that stupid to point out what they saw.

[Alright, you all hurry up and go into the classroom. It's time for class.]

After saying that, Suguro dragged his feet into the classroom. However, on the way, he bumped into a pillar.

[Thud...] The sound of the huge impact echoed through the whole corridor.

[Ouch...!!]

Suguro could not help but moan in pain as he pressed his forehead. Then he turned around and glared with his face all red before walking away as if nothing happened. Shima almost laughed again. Anxiously, Konekomaru quickly stepped on his foot.



—I admire your ascetic endurance so much.

After school at 5.30pm, I'll meet you at the back of the high school, at the

statue of Pheles-sama. See you.

First year, Hanamura Megumi

[Wow... it's so much like a love letter, it's actually a real one?!] Shima said with an envious tone while gazing at the paper. His hands while held it were shaking nonstop.

Putting aside his [Value ☆ Daily Special True Cross Academy Bento] (398 yen including tax) which was hard to get, Shima was very excited.

[What ascetic endurance? He's just a pervert. I'm clearly ten time gentler than him...]

[Shut up! Eat your lunch!!]

Not able to stand Shima's pleas, Suguro who let him see the love letter, had immediately regretted it. Because it was lunch time, the cafeteria was crowded with students. Shima's weird actions would not be too noticeable, but if it was seen by the girl who wrote the letter, maybe it would harm her?

Worried, Suguro snatched the letter from Shima.

[Ah— I haven't finished seeing it yet.]

[Hurry up and eat your lunch.]

He glared at Shima before putting the envelope into his pocket.

Although Shima complained for a while, he still returned his gaze to his own bento.

Today's lunch was miso fried pork, spaghetti and curry rice. It was as luxurious as a Turkish feast, the servings were generous and it was delicious. To the poor students, this bento was very popular so it was always sold out quickly during lunch time.

It was heard that this store had a super tasty set meal at only 500 yen. However, these three people had not tried it before it closed down. By now, it has become something like a legendary dream eating place...

[Young master, maybe she saw that incident.] Konekomaru said while deftly using his spoon to stir the noodles.

Suguro furrowed his brows confusedly.

[What incident?]

[It was two weeks ago when you got into a fight?]

[Ah... That incident.]

Now that Konekomaru mentioned it, he recalled about it.

It was in May when the Golden Week had just ended. There was a freshman who wanted find trouble with Suguro. He was a hot-tempered delinquent which was unusual in the school. He had a muscular build and had was a giant with a height of almost two metres.

Not that Suguro was proud of it, but due to the fierce gaze he was born with, his experiences with fights were uncountable. Along with how he was not someone who could remain calm, as long as someone looked for him, he would reciprocate, so these things happened too often.

[Didn't you defeat him with one blow? Maybe that girl saw it then.]

After listening to Konekomaru's reasoning, Shima clapped and exclaimed:
[Yes, this is it!]

As he opened his mouth wide to bite on his miso fried pork ribs, he said: [This is just like how in the schools for the elite young princes and princesses, the lady of the rich family would fall in love with the fierce delinquent... just like a shoujo manga!]

[WHO DID YOU SAY IS A FIERCE DELINQUENT!!]

Shima's words made Suguro's furious. [My tongue slipped.] As he tried to pacify Suguro, he spoke seriously.

[But really, it's the second half of May. Shouldn't there be new couples by now?]

[Huh?]

[In fact, rumours of so and so confussing to so and so have been increasing. How great... spring has arrived, I also want to find a girlfriend.]

Shima's expression became dazed as he shouted out about his lust.

[You moron... thinking about these things all year long.][33]

Suguro made a [there's no cure for you] kind of expression and covered his bento box.

[Eh, what are you going to do next?] Shima asked softly while giving a smile which was more crafty than usual, to Suguro who was sorting the trash seriously.

[What do you mean?]

Suguro raised an eyebrow while putting the trash into different plastic bags.

Seeing Suguro's confused expression, Shima shook his head slightly. [Young master is so dense...] he thought.

[Aren't you going to see her? After school, at the chairman's statue.]

[Oh... I've been called there, it would be bad to not go, right?] Suguro answered.

[After saying so much, young master is actually very gentle.] Konekomaru inadvertently helped Shima.

Hearing him say that, Shima's smile became even craftier.

[Go to the mentioned place, meet her, and then?]

[And then... what do you mean...]

[『I like you, please go out with me.....≡』What if she gazed at you with tear-filled eyes and said this to you? What are you going to do? Go on the adult steps in one go? I'm so jealous~~ ≡]

[Y-you're a monk!!]

Hearing Shima who was still filled with lust as usual, Suguro chastised him loudly.

However, Shima still replied indignantly: [We're living in the modern world. Now monks can marry. My father gave birth to seven children, you know?]

Unexpectedly, what he said made sense.

Suguro was speechless.

[Yeah, you're right...]

When he wanted to tell how he was going to reject the other party...

[And then, I remember that Hanamura Megumi is a real beauty?]

[! R-really? N-no, this has nothing to do with me.]

Hearing that she was a beauty, even Suguro was wavering a little. Although on the surface, he still pretended to be not interested, he was still a high school boy. Of course he could not resist the charm of a beauty.

[Really, because she's in the same class as Izumo, so I know. I heard that she's very cute. How wonderful! Why is it young master and not me...]

Shima's last sentence revealed whole-hearted jealousy once again.

[Oh, in the same class as bushy-browds huh...]

Then she's in the same normal class as us... Suguro thought.

[What? Young master, you seem to take notice of Megumi-chan. Later, do you want to pass by their class on purpose? This one—]

Shima made an uncouth smile and kept elbowing Suguro.

[Don't mess with me!!]

He showed a scary expression again while removing Shima's hands from him.

[My ambition is to defeat Satan and rebuild the temple! I don't have the time or mood to date girls!!]

He declared loudly before rising from his chair suddenly. Standing menacingly, he glared at Shima once more before dragging his heavy body to leave the cafeteria.

[Wow... he's mad.]

Shima showed a pained smile as he saw the rubbish that Suguro was sorting halfway.

[Young master even left the rubbish half sorted. It seems very serious. I think that he's totally fuming.]

Shima looked at Suguro's silhouette. As he walked, the other students all

cleared away to avoid him.

Knowing that he was the culprit, yet he was still gloating. Konekomaru who could not bear to watch this, said: [Shima, don't tease young master too much.]

It was rare that his tone sounded reprimanding.

[Young master isn't like you, he's very careful.]

Then Shima pretended to cry while saying: [That's too much~~ Konekomaru, I'm also very careful. Don't look at me like this, I have a glass heart, you know?]

After he said that, Shima put his empty bento box and the trash that Suguro was sorting halfway into a single plastic bag. He was most likely going to throw all of them into the flammable trash bin.

Totally not like what a careful person would do.

As Konekomaru thought that he was so done with him, he drank green tea from his PET bottle. Unexpectedly, Shima calmly said: [Young master, that's really troubling.]. Because it was said so softly, Konekomaru almost did not hear it.

[Eh?]

He raised his head in shock, only seeing Shima putting his hands behind his head and staring at the chair that Suguro just sat at: [Because he works too hard, then he's so tense and his temper is so short. Okumura is the same and sometimes Izumo is like that—]

[Receiving a girl's confession, even if he took it easy for a while, nothing bad will happen?]

Shima leaned back on his chair and showed a bright expression as he spoke. Seeing his friend's smile, Konekomaru's expression also became gentler.

Although he looked careless, Shima still cared a lot about Suguro.

[Otherwise if he tires himself out, he's going to collapse sooner or later.]

[Yeah.] Konekomaru closed his eyes under his glasses for a while. [Young master should learn from Shima, to try to relax.]

But once he said that, Shima stood up when he saw a girl walking past their

table.

[Konekomaru! Do you see...?! The girl with the coffee coloured short hair! She's super cute!! Oh~~ as expected of True Cross Academy! It's so great to go to school here~~≡]

Looking at him swaying, all the strength left Konekomaru's body.

[I say, Konekomaru, we should find her and become friends? Is it a good idea—]

[Shima.....]

Oh you... Konekomaru sighed deeply.

Indeed, for Suguro to be more like Shima, maybe it needed slight— no, heavy consideration, Konekomaru could not help but to think of it.



(Really, Shima is totally taken over by lust...)

Suguro raised his shoulders as he walked around the school campus.

The perverted Shima aimed for getting into a relationship while Suguro himself obviously wanted to reject.

Of course he was happy that someone liked him and he was also very touched, but.....

(I have an ambition that I want to achieve.)

If there was time to fall in love, it would be better used to go to the library for research in order to cope with the exorcist class questions or do muscle training at the gym— Anyway, limited time should be used wisely.

(I'm not easy going like Shima, so I have no time to waste on love.) Following the self-discipline of his heart, he walked towards the library block.

... And worries started to fill his head. Which is on the topic of how to reject this advance.

There was something that he did not tell even Shima and Konekomaru, actually— this is not his first time rejecting a girl's confession. For the past year, he had been confessed to around four times.

He rejected them four times and the other party cried every time.

He was sincere and wanted to be gentle when rejecting. However, he could not control the fierce appearance and hurtful tone which was passed down from his father. In the end, he was also deeply affected.

Especially when this time, Shima and Konekomaru knew about it. So no matter what, this must be prevented from happening again this time.

(I must say it properly and not make the other party cry...)

When Suguro was pondering—

[Hey, wait—]

Suddenly, there was a voice from behind.

[?!]

Hearing this obviously high voice of a female student, Suguro could not help but stiffen at the spot.

(I-is it Hanamura-san?)

She could not wait for dismissal and went to find me? ...His heartbeat quickened.

(Calm down, relax...)

He tried his best to pretend to maintain his steadiness.

[What's the matter—?] He turned around and said.

But the one standing in front of him was his exorcist class classmate— Kamiki Izumo. Suguro was a little disappointed and felt at peace. After giving a loud sigh, he immediately felt unusually ashamed for his wavering feelings just now.

[Why is it you!! Don't do things that make others misunderstand! You idiot!!]

To cover his embarrassment, he vented his anger on Kamiki.

[What!] Izumo answered angrily.

She only called out to someone, yet got shouted at for no reason. This was a normal reaction.

[Because the classroom for Demon Herbology had changed, so Okumura-

sensei asked me to pass on the message to everyone. Why did you shout at me without understanding the situation? How absurd!]

Izumo raised her eyebrows as she started to complain. Although Suguro felt a little guilty, he did not compromise. The two of them were impatient and hasty, so it was hard for them to apologise. Every time they met, they would clash like this.

[You totally couldn't pick a better time.]

Until now, the blame had been shifted to her. Izumo's eyebrows raised even higher.

[Huh? Stop the nonsense, you stupid gorilla face!!]

[Eh? What do you mean by calling me stupid! And what's a gorilla face!]

[What! You called me idiot first! I even went to notify you. How are there such people!] Izumo was extremely angry while her two thin ponytails swayed with the wind.

[Anyway, my message was conveyed! Everything else is none of my business.]

After leaving that line, she walked away, fuming.

Looking at her leaving silhouette, Suguro thought...

(This girl is really not cute even in the slightest...)

But suddenly, he remembered what Shima just said.

[Really. Because she's in the same class as Izumo, so I know—]

Suguro came to. [W-wait a bit,—Izumo!]

And called her.

[What do you want?]

As if wanting to argue, Izumo turned around with her brows tightly furrowed. Resisting urges to show anger, Suguro said: [I h-heard that you're classmates with a Hanamura...?]

[Huh?]

Poised for battle, Izumo raised an eyebrow and answered: [Hanamura... is she

a girl? Are you referring to Hanamura Megumi? We're indeed classmates.]

Suguro's heartbeat quickened.

[W-what kind of girl is she?]

[Huh? What do you mean....]

[A-as in appearance, or personality. Is she considerate, virtuous, or cute...]

[WHAT??]

Izumo's expression became more confused, but she noticed that Suguro was slightly different than before. Maybe her anger had subsided, so Izumo flicked away the long hair in front of her chest and said: [Hanamura-san should be in the library at this timing because she is part of the library club.]

[Eh.....?]

This was really unexpected.

She was at where he was heading to.

Even Suguro could not help but feel that this is what was known as [fate] in Buddhism...

The True Cross Academy's library was a old-fashioned building with vines growing on it. Although it was not that convenient, but the old style was charming and it mainly attracted girls to visit it.

Hiding at the bookshelf near the library entrance, Izumo spoke to Suguro who was behind her.

[—You see. The one standing behind the counter and arranging the books is Hanamura-san.]

[Really, why am I also hiding?] Izumo whispered crossly.

Usually, she would not poke into his business and specially tell him about this.

But she was curious about Suguro who was obviously not himself, so she could not help but to guide him along.

[Is this alright? I'm leaving.]

Izumo spoke condescendingly, but Suguro was not able to take in anything

since long ago.

All of his focus was on what was in front of where Izumo as pointing; the girl who was working alongside the librarian.

Raven hair, a slim build, fair skin and an unassuming but aesthetically pleasing countenance.

Indeed, she was a girl that would make one think of a white lotus. She looked like Suguro's mother, Torako, in the past.

[Do you want to return books? Over here—]

A soft and gentle voice sounded, which was not the flat and lilted bimbo accent that Suguro hated most. It was as if it was the caressing words of an angel as it was perfect from her words to appearance.

As expected from a girl who could make Shima's pretty girl radar react.

Suguro's heartbeat went from a nervous [thud thud] to a rapid [ba-dump ba-dump].

In the silent room, such an intense heartbeat might be heard by hear.

Calm down, cool down— Suguro shouted in his heart as he clutched his chest.

[Hey... Even with your big gorilla face, don't scare people in the library?!]

Suguro's unusual actions shocked Izumo greatly. She grabbed Suguro's hand out of thoughtfulness.

He did not even react to her saying [big gorilla face].

[Wh-what kind of girl is she usually?]

Without turning his eyes away from the girl, he asked Izumo.

Izumo left go of Suguro's arm, tilted her head and asked: [What kind of girl?]

[She's a serious good girl. Her grades are very good. Although she's quiet, but she's caring and very enthusiastic.]

After hearing this, Suguro's heartbeat quickened even more until it was almost going to burst.

[Except... she has a older twin brother. He's the complete opposite of her, a

temperamental rascal. In this school, he's one of the rare delinquent. She seems quite troubled about this—]

[It reminds one of a certain sibling combination.] Izumo continued.

If the older brother of that sibling combination heard this, he'd be greatly angered. However, Suguro did not take this in.

A beautiful appearance with intelligence. What a miracle.

Suguro's determination to reject her had slowly started to waver.



Until class ended, the demon called lust which had sprouted in Suguro's heart struggled against his reason. As he became more troubled, his eyebrows became more furrowed and his face gradually changed to look like that of a demon.

[I say... what happened to Suguro? Don't you think his face is very scary?]

[D-does he hurt anywhere? Suguro-san...]

[Ah, don't mind him. Okumura, Moriyama-san, Young Master's springtime has come.]

[What? Spring?! Isn't it spring now, is it?]

[Hahaha, not that spring~~]

[So there are many types of spring? Oh no... I don't know about them.]

[Shima... Didn't I say not to bother him?]

[Yeah, what happened to him? How strange, he looks so terrible today...]

As the Exwires looked further away, Suguro's face became even more fierce and he was silent.

Like Rodin's [Thinker], he spiraled into countless worries...^[34]

—After exorcist classes have ended, he finally reached a conclusion.

Regardless how good the other party is, I still do not have time to socialise with the opposite sex.

(I want to rebuild the temple... So I need to become a powerful exorcist to

defeat Satan!) As he was called the [son of the cursed temple], he had this ambition since he was young and his belief was not so weak that it would waver due to romance.

He used the icy water from the water cooler to wash his face and refresh himself, before walking towards the back area calmly.

Because he reached too early, there was nobody in front of the Pheles-sama statue.

Worries started to fill Suguro's head again.

[How should I reject her?]

Due to meeting Izumo, his thoughts at noon were interrupted and he had not thought of anything by now. What should be done not to bring the other party to tears and how to reject without hurting the other party as much as possible?

Suguro clutched his chest with both hands and thought very hard, but could not think of anything.

He clumsily yanked his hair in frustration.

(It would be great if Juuzou was here...)

Shima's second oldest brother— Juuzou, was a man that attracted most females besides Okumura Yukio. When he was working in the family garden of the temple of Suguro's old home, the nearby female students would father just to see a glimpse of him. When he was studying at True Cross Academy ten years ago, it was heard that he even had a fan club.

But he was very dense when it came to feelings. He was a bright youth who loved children a lot, which was one of the reasons that he attracted so many girls.

(No, Juuzou is too popular, it can't apply to my situation... Maybe Kinzou— No, Kinzou is not alright too.) Shima's fourth oldest brother, Kinzou is a blond youth who is a leader of a band. He was a handsome guy that made girls scream madly at his appearance. However, just like Okumura Rin, he was an idiot.

Even if anyone confessed to him, he could have no idea that it was a confession.

(Better resign to my fate and discuss this with Okumura-sensei... No, this would be very embarrassing.) As Suguro thought nonstop, a long shadow appeared on the ground in front of him suddenly.

(Is it... Hanamura-san?)

His heart thumped.

I have not thought of the reason— No, thinking of something insincere but politically correct, it would disappoint the other party. Because I have something that I must do, so I do not have the liberty to date girls... Determined, Suguro shut his both eyes forcefully.

[T-that, Hanamura-san, I—]

[Hello! Suguro-san. You really came! I'm so happy!!]

[Eh...?]

Suguro heard a completely different rough voice compared to the gentle one he heard earlier. He opened his eyes in shock.

In front of him, it was not Hanamura Megumi, but it was a burly male of around two metres tall. And that face seemed quite familiar.

[! You are...]

He was the male student who was defeated easily by Suguro last week.

[So sorry for last time. Thanks for remembering me, what an honour.]

[Anyway, why are you here?!]

Confused, Suguro stretched a trembling finger to point at him.

The burly guy's face turned red and he ruffled his hair.

[Nah~~ Sorry for troubling you to come here. I just really wanted to talk to Suguro-san.]

[Ah, why...?]

[Wh-what is this?]

[Ah, I wrote that.]

[What... Eh... But... The letter says Hanamura Megumi...]

[That should be read as Kei. Megumi is my younger twin sister.][35]

[Twin... sister...]

What Izumo had said earlier rang in his head.

[She has an older twin brother, who is the complete opposite of her as he is a hot-blooded delinquent, which is a rare in this school.]

In other words, his younger twin sister is Hanamura Megumi, and the one who wrote to me was...

[Then... these words are...?]

[Ah, my sister wrote this letter for me because my writing is very ugly. I also got the letter paper from her.]

No wonder the writing was so feminine. Shima said that it was fragrant because he somehow smelt the scent of the Hanamura sister. This guy's nose was as powerful as that of a police dog.

Suguro's mind was blank and felt that something in his body was gradually collapsing.

What... am I doing... and worrying about.

The worries that accumulated since morning had blew away from his mind.

[Since being defeated in one blow by Suguro-san, I had always been noticing you. Your endurance is really awesome! I admire you very much!!]

The older Hanamura brother tightly clenched his fists as he spoke.

Afterwards, he knelt on the ground.

[Suguro-san... No, Suguro-aniki, please accept me as your younger brother!!]
[36]

And then he bowed his head to the ground.

This scene which did not match an elite high school, looked like an old yakuza drama.

[I can do anything for you, but please accept me as Suguro-aniki's younger brother!]

—After this incident, Suguro who had finally understood everything, shouted:
[Don't do something which can make others misunderstand! YOU IDIOT!!]

Apparently, not even five seconds later, that burly guy was knocked down once again.

[—Oh... Kekeke... What a huge disaster... Kekeke.]

[Shima, you're laughing too much.]

Shima wanted to make a sympathetic expression, but could not control his laughter. Konekomaru stared at him sternly.

The next day, as they sat on the field to eat, Shima could not stop laughing as he heard the story.

Konekomaru showed a sympathetic expression and said: [Young master, you were already so manly since a long time ago...] Except this these words totally did not have a comforting effect.

Of course, Suguro made a sour face for a long time.

The Hanamura brother was still persistent despite being beaten up by Suguro. Having thought that he had thrown him off with a lot of effort,, that burly guy followed Suguro like a shadow. Whenever he first appeared, he pleased Suguro to accept him as his younger brother.

No wonder Suguro was unhappy.

It was not even noon, and he felt as tired as a day had been over.

[Oh... Never mind, this is a good thing, isn't it?]

Shima who still could not stop laughing, patted Suguro's shoulder.

[What kind of good thing, stop mocking me.]

Suguro glared at Shima more sternly than usual. His fierce expression was like that of a growling monster and a low voice could almost be heard.

Shima quickly comforted him by saying: [Or maybe Buddha is hinting that you should take life more easy?]

Youth cannot be regained after it is lost, so maybe you should make some effort in romance...

These words were almost at Shima's lips.

[—No.] Suguro shook his head. [This incident made me reflect deeply.]

[What?]

[Young master?]

As Shima and Konekomaru sounded their confusion at the same time, Suguro clenched his fists so tightly that the veins on his fists bulged.

[This incident is a punishment for me letting myself be swayed by love.]

[Eh?]

[Buddha is reminding me that if I have time to dabble in romance, the time should be better spent training to become a better exorcist.]

The chopsticks that he held tightly broke into two.

[I should make a training plan that is a hundred times harsher than my current one.]

[Eh, eh eh eh eh...?! This is your explanation?!]

Shima made a [this is hopeless] expression and shouted.

[With how it is, you can't go anywhere... Eh... Really, you're so abnormal.]

Konekomaru added: [As expected of young master, how wonderful.]

He sincerely admired him.

[Young master, you can do this!! I will support you fully.]

[Oh!]

Hearing Konekomaru's supportive words, Suguro nodded determinedly.

Only Shima could not follow along. He complained as he bit his bread sadly:
[He is really abnormal.]

—Thus, he started his daily life of abstinence and working hard again.

Chapter 4: Okumura Rin Rescue Team

● 奧村燐救濟會



(...It was completely falling apart.)

Okumura Yukio sighed deeply at the exam script he held. On the exam script, beside the worm-looking scribble of a name, a huge 2.5 marks (not 25 marks) was written there. Of course this was not his exam script.

The owner of the exam script is his twin older brother, Okumura Rin. He was lying on his bed reading and repeatedly wiping his tears at the Jump SQ that Yukio had bought. His occasional nose blowing was so loud that it made one even more irritated.

In short, he was an eyesore.

[It can't be. How can there be something so tragic in this world... Ohh.] A catastrophe was imminent. Yet he was completely immersed into the characters of the manga. With his appearance, it could not be seen that he liked touching television shows and tea-jerking stories a lot. However, Yukio was more picky about about plot instead.

(—Nii-san's brain is more tragic.)

After complaining to himself, he looked again at his older brother's exam script on the table and felt a headache coming.

The best score was this 2.5 points already. Only a ghost would not feel a headache at this. The others had 0.3 points, 1.2 points and each one would trouble the person marking the script a lot.

Actually Nii-san did not even enter the True Cross Academy High School by proper entrance tests. For him to study the exorcist course in the school, Mephistopheles used his authority as chairman to let him enrol. In other words, he did not go through the so-called super hard entrance exams, so even if it was the normal course, he could not keep up with the other students.

Even so, this is too appalling.

If he does not score well in next week's finals, he could be expelled.

Yukio held the exam script and stood up from his chair and walked slowly to his older brother's bed to take away the SQ.

[Ah, you return the SQ to me.]

[This is mine in the first place. Anyway, nii-san, you should know that now is not the time to be slacking and reading manga]

Rin was protesting vehemently although the magazine did not belong to him. Yukio stuffed a stack of exam paper full of huge crosses in front of Rin before crossing his arms and squinting his eyes under his glasses into a single line.

[0.8 marks. This one has 1.7 marks... And you even wrote your name wrongly here.]

[I, what can I do? Your [雪男] (Yukio) is so simple and mine is [燐] (Rin). Kanji is so hard to write!]^[37]

[Fine, I'll go back a hundred steps and let you write in hiragana. If you write like this, it's not [Okumura Rin] since it becomes [Okumura Ryuu]. Who is Okumura Ryuu?]^[38]

[...Boohoo.]

[I'm not done. This English exam script has [RIM OKIMVRA] written on it. When did you become a foreigner?]

[.....]

[I'm really worried about Nii-san's future.]

Yukio sighed and pushed his glasses up at the same time.

Rin sat on his bed and whistled with a whooshing sound. He was planning to gloss over this and not a single bit of remorse could be seen on his face. Also, his whistling had a melody and once he found an opportunity, he would try to snatch the SQ back from Yukio.

Yukio really felt very worried about his older brother's future.

As long as Mephisto is still chairman, he could make the higher-ups shut one eye. But as the younger brother, he still wished that Rin could use grades that were more normal to get through this term.

Today is Friday night which is only 2 whole days away from next Monday's final exams. If the spartan spoon-feeding method was used in these two days — because Nii-san was only exceptionally lucky — maybe he had a chance to

barely pass.

However, there was a gaping flaw in this plan.

Of course the person teaching Rin would have to be Yukio. But there was mountains of paperwork to complete by the upcoming end of term. Also, he was one of the students in the gifted class of True Cross Academy High School section, so together with his exorcist class lecturer job, he was already extremely busy usually. By next Monday, besides preparing for his own exams, he had to also set the exam questions for the finals of the exorcist class. Besides that, he also had to submit reports for things such as applying for permission to conduct extra remedial sessions during summer holidays.

Maybe there could even be last-minute exorcist missions.

He completely had no spare time to spend on teaching his brother.

The best case would be that Nii-san could start studying quietly spontaneously, but looking at the current situation, it was unlikely to happen. He would most likely continue to read his manga intensely and start sleeping when he felt tired. He would probably spend tomorrow and the day after like that.

(I have no choice.....)

Yukio returned to his table and picked up his phone. He opened his contacts to the exorcist class group and pressed one of the numbers.

The other party picked up his phone within three rings.

Yukio's face which was originally anxious and depressed, instantly become calmer and he used a gentle voice to speak.

[—Ah, is this Suguro-san? I am Okumura-sensei. Sorry for disturbing you at such a late hour. How is your exam preparations going? I see...As expected of Suguro-san, I really want to ask Nii-san to learn from you. Actually the reason that I'm calling, it's because of a personal request...]

A few minutes had passed. When Yukio hung up the phone, his older brother had already snatched back the SQ and was once again lying on bed and blowing his nose loudly.



—On the next morning, the male dormitory of the True Cross Academy was more lively than usual.

True Cross Academy adopts a boarding school structure, so almost all the students lived in dormitories. However, the students live in the newly-built blocks and only the Okumura brothers used this block that looked more like a haunted hotel due to its dilapidated state.

—One of the rooms in the old block— unit 104 which is different from unit 602 which is usually used by them.

Today, the ones gathered here are Suguro Ryuuji, Shima Renzou, Miwa Konekomaru, Kamiki Izumo... almost all the first years of the exorcist class came and everyone brought sports backpacks like that time when they cohabited together.

[...In other words, we only need to teach Okumura how to study?] Suguro represented the group to ask.

Without furniture, the dormitory room looked very spacious... or rather, deserted. In the middle, there was a long table seen often in dormitories. A very unhappy Rin was forced to sit in front of the table while Yukio stood beside him and spoke in a gentle voice as if they were in class: [I apologise greatly to everyone for occupying precious time before exams. I think this should be easier than teaching a monkey, so everyone please help my brother. I will be in another room and contact me immediately if there's anything— I will come back later to take a look.]

After he bowed to the Exwires to send his regards, he turned to face his older brother who was shouting: [WHO DID YOU SAY WAS A MONKEY?] to him.

[Nii-san, if you dare to escape, I'll make you sit straight and hold a Bariyon all night. You better behave.]

Yukio smiled as he spoke and walked out of the door afterwards. Just to mention, a Bariyon is a demon that possesses stones or rocks. Besides emitting weird noises, it is harmless. But it is very heavy, so if placed on knees when sitting upright, it would be just like torture during the Edo period.

[He casually became the devil.] Shima said. [A brightly expressed devil.]

[I'm really sorry to you all... for ruining your rare break.]

Staring at the door which Yukio left from resentfully, Rin apologised to his classmates who were walking into the room while scratching his head.

[I troubled everyone again.]

[—Exactly, how troublesome.]

Izumo pursed her lips hard and complained. She took out a pile of reference books from her backpack and laid them out on the table.

[...S-sorry.]

Hearing Izumo say that, Rin felt extremely self-conscious.

[When things get tough, we should help each other, Okumura-kun.]

Konekomaru immediately started to comfort, then he looked Suguro who was behind him.

[Right? Young master.]

[Whatever, he has already sunk to this extent, so we have to help.]

Suguro who answered, placed the largest luggage among everyone heavily in the corner of the room. Besides a lot of reference books, assessment books and handwritten notes, there was something that looked like a wooden pole which stuck out from his sports backpack.

Rin's heart skipped a beat.

(Wh-what's that? That thing which looks like a flat wooden sword...What is he going to do with it...) He very much felt like asking out of curiosity, but he also did not want to make a fool of himself. He thought that besides arousing his suspicions, a ghost might even appear from it.

Towards Rin who was unsettled, Suguro asked: [Oh yeah, which subject are you weakest at? Modern Japanese? Classical Japanese? Maths? Economics?]

[English. Okumura-kun looks like he is very afraid of English.]

Shima interrupted as he placed his luggage at the wall of the room.

[Last time, he even said that he was a [[Mistake man]], it should be [Mystic], right?]^[39]

Also, note that only mistake and mystic are in English so the man part of Mistake man was said in Japanese.) [Yeah, that's English. But it best to be not so greedy for now. Just focusing on tackling weak subjects is enough— Do you have other weak subjects?]

[Hmm, my weak subject is.....] Rin racked his brain while lowering his voice. [All of them...]

Suguro was dumbfounded immediately upon hearing it.

[All of them? You said all... There's only two days left, how is it possible to salvage in two days!!]

[If everyone take charge of different subjects and teach him, I think we can cope.]

To Suguro who was agitated, Konekomaru quickly calmed him down. Beside them, Shima opened a coffee-coloured envelope.

[Oh, just now Okumura-sensei handed this to me before leaving.]

Are the exam questions inside here? ...Shima thought as he was opening the envelope that Yukio gave him. In the end, there was a huge pile of dismal exam scripts inside...

Everyone fell silent.

[1.2 marks...?!]

[What's that, results for a vision test?]^[40]

[This is not something that can be salvaged within a mere two days.]

Everyone looked at each other. Even Konekomaru whose specialty was mediating disputes also could not say a word. Rin cowered even more.

[—Alright, don't worry, Okumura-kun.]

Shima who accidentally made the atmosphere in the area drop a few degrees, suddenly used a bright tone to speak.

[Izumo is a top scholar of the class, young master has the makings of a pervert — no, a genius. Konekomaru is good at teaching, and Takara-kun.....]

When he reached there, he gave a cursory glance across the room. The most mysterious and quiet person in the class, Takara, was fiddling with his puppet which he can do ventriloquism with without a care.

Why was he even called here, it still remained a mystery.

[I think he's smart.]

Shima forcefully put up his thumb and smoothed over his speech.

[We'll cross the bridge when we come to it, there is no such thing as an endless night.]

[Oh!]

Rin could not help but clap his hands and cheer at the lines which sounded like it came from an advertisement. However, Suguro glared at Shima suspiciously.

[What's up with you, speaking so spiritedly but you never count yourself. Anyway, do you have the right to be teaching anyone?]

Shima proudly laughed at Suguro's questioning. [Kekeke, young master, don't look down on me. Don't look at me like this, in my three years of high school, my health education grades were all full 120 marks. Kamiki, I'm amazing, right ≡]

[Eh...But there's no health education tested for this finals.]

Suddenly asked for her agreement, Izumo raised her head to stare at Shima as she backed away, with her upper body slightly maintaining a distance from Shima.

[Health education is not important. How about your other subjects? Who knows, it could even not much different from Okumura.]

[Hahaha, I'm not that bad. My average for all the subject still have 15 marks.]

Shima announced this coolly while the whole room sunk into silence again.

Only Rin gave an admiring gaze.

[How many times of my marks is your average of 15 marks? How amazing, Shima, actually you do have brains.]

[I'm right, aren't I? Everyone says that I'm a man who would give my all.]

After hearing Rin's praise, Shima also proudly puffed his chest.

[No way, I'm getting a headache.] Suguro clutched his head.

—In the end, Shima and Rin had to be tutored by the other students.

Rin and Shima sat shoulder to shoulder while facing the window. Opposite them was Suguro, Konekomaru and Izumo. Paku sat beside Izumo, but she seemed to lack interest in her surroundings.

[It would be better if Shima and Okumura sat separately.] Suguro suggested.

[Split everyone into two groups, to teach Shima and Okumura-kun, right?] Konekomaru answered to Suguro's suggestion and quickly said: [Or maybe split by subject?]

With his good hearing, Shima immediately spoke after hearing it: [This way, can I have one to one with Izumo~~?]

He suddenly became extremely enthusiastic and even leaned forward to get closer to Izumo who was sitting opposite him.

[Teach me gently, alright? You're so cute today, this cutie is so beautiful and the stars on your shirt suits you≡]

Shima completely showed his desire, so Suguro grabbed his pink hair and pulled him back.

[You're with me.]

[Eh... young master!]

[I'll do one to one with you.]

Being stared at with the hellish eyes of a demon, Shima looked like a deflated balloon.

He looked at Konekomaru who was next to Suguro and gazed at him pleadingly [Shima is better off cutting ties with his lust.]

[Even Konekomaru too...]

In front of Shima who was sighing and lowering his head, Suguro mercilessly piled the practice questions into tall mountains. Afterwards, he rapidly circled pages and left markings on them.

[Within an hour, finish whatever I have ticked and put it in the return tray. Listen carefully. If you fail, I have no face to see Yaozou.^[41]

[That's too much... At this time, it should be a girl teaching me gently and precisely and then our feelings for each other will develop... It should end up with romance, how did the situation become like this?]

About to cry, Shima still looked at Izumo stubbornly.

Seeing Shima having such strong desires despite being a monk, a vein popped on Suguro's forehead.

[Konekomaru, bring the keisaku and whack him hard for me.]

He gave the order and Konekomaru's expression turned serious as he nodded his head before taking that long wooden stick from Suguro's sports backpack.

That keisaku was used to boost one's concentration during meditation in the temple. It looked like it was already used for a long time.

Konekomaru stood behind Shima and raised the keisaku which was almost as tall as him while Shima's face turned green immediately upon seeing it.

[...No, it can't be, you aren't doing this for real, are you? It's just an act right? Ko-konekomaru?]

[Shima, you're guilty.]

Konekomaru shut both eyes and said painfully, but after letting out a loud shout, his expression when using his strength to whack was completely not confused. In the next moment...

WHACK—

A heavy noise which seemed to tear flesh apart sounded loudly in the room.

[AH~~~~!!]

Immediately, Shima gave out a shrill cry, as if he had seen an army of bugs,

which reverberated through the whole old block.

His eyes white, he laid on the table.

Suguro looked at his watch as if nothing happened.

[Fifty-seven minutes left.]

Calmly counting down the remaining time.

[S-so scary...]

The tragic scene in front of Rin made him shiver all over and anxiously keeping a distance from those three people.

Although he could sympathise with Shima, he felt lucky that the long stick was not used on him.

Not long after being calm, he was immediately grabbed by Izumo who was waiting for him.

[You come with me.]

[Wh-whoa!]

Under the angry glare of Izumo whose eyebrows were furrowed deeply, Rin sat at the end of the table opposite to her. Izumo took out her handwritten notes and dumped them in front of Rin.

[Listen up! For maths, you only need to remember formulas so that you can gain points. Afterwards, you must catch the important points—]

[Wow, that's wonderful, your words are super pretty.]

The words looked like the correct ones that a teacher would write and the steps were written close to each other on the notebook. Highlighter marks were seen everywhere and sometimes there were pictorial explanations. It was a precise girl's notebook: easy to read and very simple to understand.

Seeing this notebook which was worlds apart from his own, Rin who was greatly touched, praised Izumo from the bottom of his heart: [I couldn't tell that you were this smart.]

[I...Th-this is nothing! It's strange looking at you who only sleeps during class and not even copy any notes. What do you even go to school for!]

With even her ears going red, Izumo raised her eyebrows again to glare at Rin. I still have to get scolded even when praising someone honestly, Rin thought.

(How scary...) He became so nervous that his whole body turned stiff.

[I'm going to start from this question, alright? Why are you still dawdling? Hurry up and get your mechanical pencil out!]

[...Oh, okay.]

Like a domesticated animal, Rin obediently followed the order and held his mechanical pencil.

Along with Izumo's scolding, he started solving the maths problems

However, his head only bobbed from left to right, without any progress in the questions he had to do.

Wrinkles gradually filled Izumo's forehead.

So she anxiously asked:

[...Don't tell me that you don't even know how to solve nine times nine...]

[Nah, I know. Two times two is four, two times three is six—]

[Eight times nine.]

[Forty-two.]

Rin happily answered Izumo's question.

Both eyes tightly shut, Izumo placed both hands heavily on the table.

The old table started squeaking due to the impact.

[...Eight times nine is seventy-two.]

[Eh? Seventy-two? Didn't I say that?]

Rin ruffled his messy hair and planned to get over this by smiling obliviously. Izumo glared at him fiercely and said: [You clearly said forty-two, forty-two! The correct answer is seventy-two! Why when eight times eight equals sixty-four, the next one will be eight times nine equals to seventy-two? Why would it become lesser?!]

[Don't sweat the small stuff, it's just a number away so there's no much

difference.]

[Of course I mind! Don't you know? Multiplication up to the nine times tables is that of elementary second grade, how do I turn you into a high school first year in two days?!]

[Don't be angry, all the best for this, Eyebrows.]

[The one who should be trying his best said it, and don't call me Eyebrows.]

As if nothing had happened, Rin patted Izumo's shoulders and that made her furious immediately. Of course, there was still no progress with the questions.

[How great...Okumura-kun can have a lover's squabble with Izumo.]

Shima who was also forced to do practice questions saw them and mumbled enviously.

In his eyes full of desire, unstoppable tears even flowed in them.

[—Shima.]

At how Shima was still desiring girls even at such a stage, Konekomaru also made an expression that said [nothing can be done about this].

Sitting opposite Shima, Suguro who was crossing his arms suddenly faced his devilish face and said: [It looks like a lover's squabble because your brain is full of lust. Konekomaru, do it.

Suguro turned to Konekomaru and Konekomaru lightly nodded his head.

When Shima was aware, the keisaku behind him was lifted high into the air.

[Eh, eh...W-wait!]

[Troubles, go away! HAARGH!!]

[Waahhhh~~!!]

Once again, wailing was surrounded by the hot air brought in from the window before disappearing like an illusion. Shima laid on the table with his eyes white again.

[Shima, don't die! I won't allow you to die!!]

[Hurry up and solve your problems!!]

In a corner against the wall, Takara whose eyes might be close or open, gazed at them and said: [[Hmph...what a noisy bunch of brats.] Using his ventriloquism, his white rabbit puppet spoke.

Just to mention, nobody has heard his real voice yet.



From eight-thirty in the morning until now which was already beyond twelve noon, Shima and Rin were both complaining.

[No way! I can't do this! It's so hot that I can't think! My brain is melting!!]

[Me too... I can't make it... if I can't breath some fresh air... I'll die.]

It was now mid July. With the sun's shining menacingly, the old block which had no air-conditioning was in a sauna-like state.

Besides the two people who were forced to solve problems, even the people in charge of teaching them were also starting to become tired. Only Takara who was not doing anything was still energetic. God knows what was his body made of, seeing that in this dizzying heat, he was unfazed by it.

[—I can't do anything about you. Alright, take a ten minute break.] Suguro said while using a towel to wipe his sweat.

Izumo let out a long breath while fanning herself with her messy hair sticking on her pale neck. Konekomaru also finally put down the keisaku.

[Eh... only ten minutes. Young master... that's too cruel.]

[Not happy? Then it will be five minutes, Shima.]

[...I'm going to the toilet.]

Shima swallowed his tears dejectedly before leaving with Rin into the corridor to breathe some fresh air.

Because the block was old, the corridor would occasionally squeak loudly. Shima clumsily ran behind Rin who turned around listlessly.

[Hey, Shima...]

[Okumura, let's escape.] Shima whispered to Rin with his face filled with determination.

[Escape? How—]

[Shh.] Shima quickly tried to silence Rin while gazing at their surroundings.

[With young master, who knows when is the next break. Now is our only chance.]

Shima looked like he was acting in a spy flick, but Rin replied in a depressed tone.

[But, Yukio said if we escaped, the Bariyon would be upon us...]

[Anyway, just don't let him find us. If he can't find anyone, how can we be punished?]

After Shima spoke, he put both hands together again and said: [This is too strange.]

[It's summer now. Usually summer comes with many happy things, it should be a season that makes one happy and excited. Let's see: Girls in swimsuits, girls in swimsuits, girls in swimsuits, girls in swimsuits, girls in swimsuits— But why do we have to suffer by studying in this sauna? Am I right, Okumura?]

[Hey, you only mentioned girls in swimsuits.]

[The only other thing comparable to girls in swimsuits are girls in bathrobes just after bathing.]

[It's not like I can't understand your feelings... I also know.] Rin agreed.

So the two of them looked at each other and silently nodded. What was different was their serious and determined expressions. They both headed to the gate of the dormitory.

[WHACK] Their shoulders were suddenly hit loudly and at the same time, a thick hand appeared.

[—May I ask where are you two going?]

A gentle voice and strength which could even rival a gorilla, the contrast made their hearts palpitate. With their faces green, they turned around in fear.

It was a sight they have never seen before: Suguro smiling widely.

[Su-Suguro... H-hey~ How are you? Although we were togetehr just now...]

[Y-young master... you're here?]

[The weather was really hot, so I wanted to go outside to get some wind. Also, the toilet is not there, Shima.] Suguro answered with a smile while a drop of sweat was dropping down Shima's temple.

[Ah, y-yeah, the toilet is on that side, I'm so careless~~]

[Ha, hahaha... Shima, you're such an idiot~~ Getting lost at this age~~]

Rin quickly tried to add something in order to get this over and done with faster.

[You two are trying to escape, aren't you?]

[!!]

Suguro asked in a deep voice, with a smile still plastered on his face. Their expressions suddenly froze. [Whoa.]

[...You don't seem to realise who we're doing this for.]

The two of them were unable to move, as if they were frogs being stared at. Suguro's smiley face instantly changed to an expression which can even scare demons from hell.

[Go back to your rooms now. The punishment is just more questions. Or else, I have other plans. How? Which one is better? You choose.]

Suguro stretched out both arms which had his veins popping out while he cracked his knuckles loudly.

[We'll]

[Go back.]

The two of them answered continuously with robotic voices. Dejectedly, they looked like calves being brought to slaughter.

After summer that year, it seemed that a sad tune of [Donna Donna] can be heard from somewhere.^[42]



—Besides Yukio coming to send lunch, there were no breaks and the two of

them were forced to answer questions nonstop until Suguro heard the melody which announced that it was already 5pm.

[Alright, rest for 30 minutes.]

When he announced this, Rin and Shima did not have the strength to escape already.

The pairs were either tiredly resting on the floor or leaning on the table. Nobody had the energy to even complain that 30 minutes was too short or cheer for rest time.

Unknowingly, the sun's rays from outside the window had become a deep red and the wind had a warmth to it.

[How tiring...] Izumo said while arranging her slightly messy hair before tying a new ponytail. Shima who would usually say something to this was silent— No, he was trying his best to answer, but he was helpless against his exhaustion...

Looking at Shima, Konekomaru slowly put the keisaku on the table, saying: [Looks like we did not need the keisaku in the end.]

[Konekomaru... after taking away lust from me, what do you think is left...]

A dying Shima looked like he was going to cry blood.

Rin lay on the floor wide open, moaning as steam kept rising from his head.

Suguro crossed his body before going to Izumo's side to ask: [Hey, Kamiki, how is it on your side?]

[He managed to memorise the nine times table with a lot of effort.]

Izumo scrunched her eyebrows as she looked at the collapsed Rin on the ground.

With his whole face red and only the whites of his eyes seen, Rin seemed to be talking in his sleep as he kept chanting. [Four times two equals eight, four times three equals twelve] He even made mistakes, saying that four times five was ten.

[So I was saying, why would it decrease!] Izumo angrily shouted before drooping her shoulders.

[...how will they manage later on?]

[The future looks bleak.]

Suguro pressed on his temple.

At the same time, Takara who was across the room said: [{Tsk... thanks to these brats, even I'm tired}] To which the puppet on his hand responded. [You have any suggestions?]

Suguro was so upset that he stood up in reaction.

[You're just watching! Anyway, what were you doing!!]

[Forget it.] Konekomaru immediately went to Suguro.

[Everyone is tired. From what Okumura-sensei said, he would bring dinner, so I'll go buy some popsicles.]

[Oh, thank you.] Suguro thanked him.

Beside him, Rin was mumbling lifelessly: [Pop-popsicles...]

[Okumura-kun wants popsicles, right?]

Konekomaru smiled as he walked towards the exit. When he opened the difficult to open door, the last Exwire— Moriyama Shiemi appeared in front of him.

Wearing yukata whenever outside school, today she wore a yukata with cute prints. She also held a huge wooden plate with a fly bird print cloth covering it.

[Ah, Miwa-kun.]

[Eh? Moriyama-san? Why are you here?]

[Oh, it's really Moriyama-san.]

[Shi-Shiemi...?]

Everyone's view went towards the direction of Konekomaru's voice. Shiemi who was easily nervous, tried her best to speak while her face was turning red.

[Ah, Yuki-chantold me about everyone—]

During the day, Yukio went to visit her former home, the Exorcist Shop which specialises in selling exorcist supplies. After hearing about the happenings in the

hostel, she requested Yukio to send dinner to everyone.

[Because I didn't go to school, so I can't help with academic things. But if I want to cook... I should be able to help...]

She gradually lost confidence until her voice almost could not be heard near to the end. Her hands which were holding the wooden plate were also shaking nonstop.

Konekomaru took the plate and used a voice which was loud enough for everyone to hear to announce: [Everyone, Moriyama-san helped us prepare dinner.]

Rin who was originally collapsed on the ground, revived in a moment.

[Yay, it's dinner time!]

[As expected of Shiemi-san! A girl cooking... I think there's a holy light behind you.] Shima put his hand together towards Shiemi in a mock praying pose.

Suguro smiled and thanked her.

Looking at everyone's responses, Shiemi held her face with her reddening face and said: [Th-This is nothing... although it's not very good.... but it's better today compared to usual.]

[I'm looking forward to it.]

Konekomaru gently took off the cloth from the wooden plate. In the next moment, there was a rumbling sound from the wooden plate. Luckily or unluckily, Konekomaru never heard it.

[These are what we're eating?]

[Yeah— It's the vanilla biscuits and herbal soup that Grandma taught me. Th-This is my best cooking.] Shiemi explained.

[Finally! A girl's handmade soup and biscuits! Oh... it's just like a boy's dream!!]

Hearing Shiemi's answer, Shima was so touched that he almost cried.]

[...Really, it's wonderful to be living.]

Even after going the keisaku, his lust still returned.

[Ah, there's also vanilla tea. I brought it in a flask, so do drink more of it.]

[Oh— Although I don't know what it is, but it seems delicious.]

From the other side of the table, Rin was so happy that he was drooling. [Despite not knowing what is vanilla, if only there was meat] thought Rin. His tail which hid under his clothes almost could not resist swaying.

Beside him, Suguro said: [It seems good for the body.]

He was also happy.

[Then I'll put it on the table. Can you help me put the textbooks at the side?]

Konekomaru squatted down and placed the plate at the side of the table.

[Ah, Miwa-kun, I'll help too.]

[Don't we need to wipe the table?]

Everyone (excluding Takara) happily cleared the things off the table. Only Izumo noticed that there was an unusual smell under the cloth and a strange sound...



[...Alright, the report is finally done.]

Yukio moved his face away from the calculator and rubbed his tired eyes lightly. Whenever he fully concentrated on a particular task, he would be so engrossed in it to the extent of forgetting to eat and sleep. This was a bad habit of his.

The sky outside the window was red and cloudy.

He looked at his watch which showed that it was already beyond 5pm.

Yukio did some stretching on his chair. Not just his eyes, even his shoulders also felt very sore.

[I wonder how Nii-san and the rest are doing?]

Since he sent the bento at noon, he never showed his face at the study group.

As Shiemi said she would bring dinner to them, then he could buy some drinks and biscuits to bring there. That was what Yukio thought as he took his phone

and wallet before he left.

The room where everyone was studying is room 104 on the first floor. Although the building was old, the sound would not reach Yukio's room on the sixth floor.

At the main door of the dormitory, Yukio heard the noise of joyous clamour. Shiemi seems to have arrived, so everyone should be enjoying dinner now.

With a smile spreading on his face, Yukio walked out of the dormitory.

In the True Cross Academy which was shrouded by the evening sun, he casually strolled to the nearest supermarket. The originally scorching heat has now become a dry breeze.

Although he was uneasy about the study group, but from the situation at noon, his brother seems to be studying very seriously. Instead of saying that he was studying obediently, it was more like he was being stared at by Izumo and Suguro, with a feeling that he was out of his wits.

But this way, he would not need to worry about Rin escaping.

For some reason he did not know, even Shima also became one of those students being taught. —Besides this, there seems to have not much problems. Suguro's sense of responsibility is very strong, Konekomaru is very understanding while Izumo had a serious and hardworking personality.

Although this judgment was only done after the event, his inviting everyone to supervise his brother seems to be not a bad idea.

[You're such an idiot! How can the author of [Genji Monogatari] be Hikaru GENJI?! It's not an autobiography.]^[43]

[It's not wrong, I think I heard Kin-nii say this before...]

[You and Kinzou are equally stupid!! Also, the author of [Houjouki] ^[44]

[Don't be so angry, young master. He was only wrong by a little bit.]

[A little bit?! He's not even there!! The author of [Genji Monogatari] is Murasaki Shikubu and the author of [Houjouki] is Kamo no Choumei.]

[Whoa— how amazing!! Suguro, your brain is really good.]

[You still have time to admire others! Why does this answer have two decimals?]

[? Decimals... what are those?]

[—! Argh— I hate this...! Teaching a monkey would be easier than teaching you.]

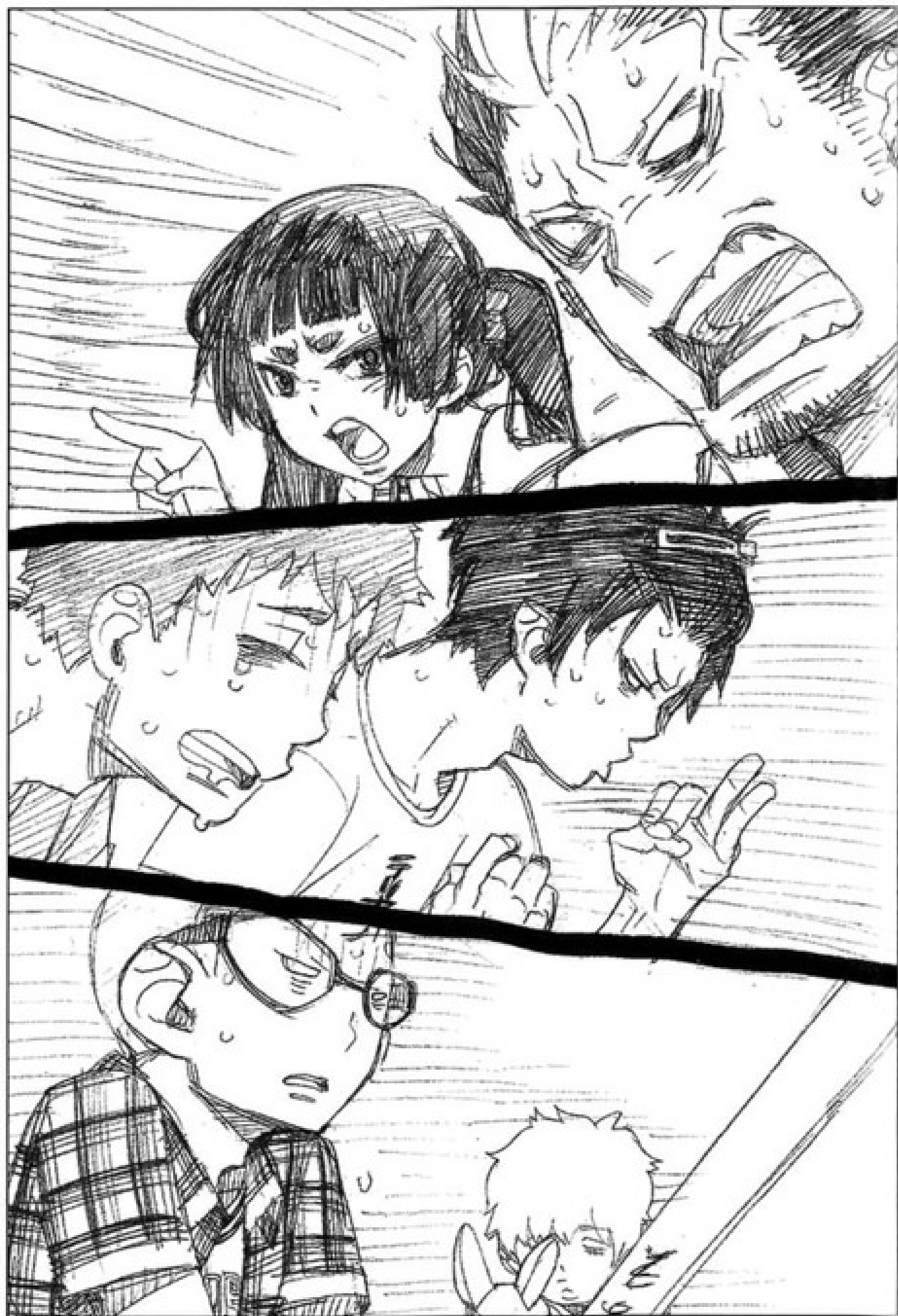
[Ah—! Izumo, your [Argh— I hate this] sounds so cute and sexy! Say it again for me to hear~~≡]

[Hey...]

[Konekomaru, don't give any mercy, whack him with enough force to knock him out.]

[Amida Butsu!!]^[45]

[Eh... W-wait, you didn't even grunt and went directly... Ah, ah ah ah ah~~!!]



[Keke.....]

Yukio was selecting the fruit juice he would buy for everyone to reward them. As he thought of the conversation he heard near the room during noon, he could not help but laugh. Just then...

[What's up, you cowardly four-eyes? Laughing by yourself there, how disgusting. Your brain must have finally burnt out.]

Behind him, a very impolite voice sounded.

She is the ex-apprentice of his late adopted father, Fujimoto Shirou. Also a guardian of Rin, she is even more of a superior of Yukio— Kirigakure Shura. Just to mention, she is 18 years old ≡— Or so as she says, actually— she's 16 years old. Although she has a sharp tongue, but she has a large rack and wears revealing clothes which makes one not know where to look at. At that moment, she was wearing a thin thigh-length kimono. It seems to be... no, it was just nightwear.

The other customers were all dumbfounded and even turned to look around at least twice.

[No, that's because— Wait, what do you mean when you said cowardly?]

Yukio calmly answered. If he accidentally replied casually, this strange nickname would definitely stay.

[Shura-san, what were you doing today?]

[Sleeping.]

So it was indeed nightwear.

Sleepy, Shura resisted yawning while she put some True Cross brand beer and wine into her basket.

There was an 80% probability that it was bought to be her first shot of alcohol after she woke up, or to while time away after her meal. From her appearance, it was not hard to see that she was liked drinking a lot and she had a poor stomach for alcohol. Anyone who drank with her would be doomed. Because Yukio was underage, he never drank with her. But he was involved in a few incidents caused by her being drunk.

[Huh, Coward, buying so many things.]

[So old already and still an errand boy. You're pathetic.]

Shura looked at Yukio's basket and laughed while questioning him.

[Nope. Anyway, the only one who treats me like an errand boy is you? These are rewards.]

[Rewards?]

Shura tilted her head in confusion. Yukio told her all about the study session.

[Teaching him is even harder than teaching a monkey.]

Shura ruffled her messy bed hair. She resisted yawning again and asked Yukio: [Oh yeah, why were you laughing so strangely just now?]

[I didn't.....]

Yukio hesitated. Usually, he would probably smile and move on. But this time, he was being frank for some reason— [...It's unusual to see Nii-san get along with his classmates.]

When Rin was still in junior high, he could not control his strength and lost control sometimes. Because of that, people around him feared him and was often isolated from groups.

Not even mentioning hikes or school celebrations, he was even absent for graduation trips.

As Yukio had his own exorcist duties, he never got to know his classmates well. Although he got along with everyone, he never had any special memories.

But, he felt that his older brother always wanted to reach out and make friends.

[So, if Father could see how Nii-san is like now...]

He would be very glad— Yukio swallowed these words and smiled without saying more.

Seeing Yukio like this, Shura made an expression which looked like she had seen a rare treasure. In the end, she still smiled slightly and used her usual tone and knocked the back of Yukio's head lightly.

[—Really, if you continue being so precocious, you'll be balding soon.]



After saying goodbye to Shura who went home, Yukio returned to the old dormitory. It was now night, while the sky had still had some light in it.

One could still see a single star faintly. Looking at his watch, the time is already 5.50pm. Everyone should have finished their dinner.

He walked through the creaky corridor and reached in front of room 104. Putting everything to his left hand, there was no response when he knocked the door.

On the other side of the door, there was no noise. Rather, it was completely silent.

Was there an argument?

Noticing something was weird, Yukio opened the door. He was greeted by a pungent stench. Everyone's faces were green and sat inside the room as if they were at a wake. Rin and Shima were sitting in the middle while the others had collapsed on the tables and the ground with the whites of their eyes showing. Shima and the others were frothing at the mouth, as if in the next second, their souls would fly away from their mouths.

Also, Shiemi was no where to be seen.

[This.... What's this?]

Even Yukio was unable to judge what was going on, so he asked Konekomaru who was nearest to him.

[Miwa-san, what happened? Nii-san—What happened to Okumura and Shima-san?]

[Ah, Okumura-sensei... you're back?]

Konekomaru turned around and told Yukio about what happened with an expression full of pain.

[Moriyama-san brought food for us to eat, but—]

The cooking that Shiemi brought was so for health, but the taste was not

acceptable by everyone. ([How to I describe it... it's a very unique taste.] said the gentle Konekomaru vaguely.) [Eh... But, everyone ate it?]

[Yes... that happened.]

Smelling the stench, Izumo who immediately noticed something was wrong said: [I-I'll just take a little since I'm on a diet.]

She acted first, while the mentally strong Suguro thought: [—As long as I treat this as training, there is nothing I cannot eat.]

With this kind of mindset and the belief of [I must not make girls cry], he resisted the pain and silently chewed the food. Konekomaru also followed him.

Takara used his puppet to pick up the spoon and ate it with big spoonfuls without changing his expression. This added even more mysteries to him.

[Shima and Okumura-san, at first they fought to say [A large bowl! No, an extra large bowl]...]

After eating the first bite, their faces started to turn green. But because Shiemi was looking at them with such sparkly eyes, they had no choice but to force themselves to finish eating.

[In my eyes, they were totally brave.]

[Is that so? Is it that terrible tasting... no, then what happened to Shiemi-san?]

[Moriyama-san, she—]

Shiemi saw everyone— no, actually it was only Rin and Shima— eating all of her cooking and felt extremely happy. Because everyone drank a lot of herbal tea to swallow the disgusting charred things into their stomachs, so she went to Exorcist Shop to bring more tea over.

According to what Konekomaru said, Rin and Shima could be considered brave, because they only lost consciousness only after Shiemi could not be seen in the premises. Before that, they still grinned and bear it by saying: [It's delicious, Shiemi...]

[...I c-can't... too delicious... that... I want to cry for some reason...]

[However, since they ate healthy things, at least there would be no risk of

stomachache. Maybe their condition will become better?]

Even Suguro could not help but sympathise with them.

[They ate more than us, this is also one of the factors that cause pain. Because it is a girl's home made coking... so they held a lot of expectations, yet...]

[So it is even more despairing.] Konekomaru looked at those two with pity.

[...I-I can't believe... that a girl's hand made cooking... actually tastes like this... it's a lie.] Shima moaned nonstop while lying down next to his (Yukio's) brother.

In a semiconscious state, tears of sadness and distress flowed nonstop. Looks like Konekomaru's opinion was not completely wrong.

They leaned against the table legs and the floor, occasionally thinking about what happened before while convulsing. Yukio showed an unfathomable expression to look at them and suddenly inquired: [Suguro-san, Kamiki-san, how is their progress on studying?]

[—There was very little progress, more like back to square one].

Suguro said with a agonised expression as he recalled.

Using a handkerchief full of printed little stars to cover her mouth, Izumo said: [He can still get his 9 x 9 multiplication wrong.], reflecting Rin's terrible situation.

Hearing all these, Yukio walked towards the two of them who were still on the ground and bent down. As if close to death, they looked up in pain.

[Yu-Yukio... I, I can't... M-my... last meal... I want to e-eat sukiyaki until I'm full...]

Rin's eyes turned whie again, while Shima who was leaning against the table said: [I, I also cannot take it...I want to oox with a cute girl before I...]

Afterwards, he said some things that require censoring and shut his eyes regrettably.

[Still kicking, huh.]

Suguro and Kamiki said at the same time with expressions of [how hopeless].

Yukio pushed the middle of his glasses up without saying a word, then used a voice which cannot be any more gentler to the the two of them who lay exhausted: [—Okumura-san, Shima-san. Please rise.]

[...Sukiyaki...?]

[You brought girls... over...?]

Rin and Shima looked him listlessly.

[How could it be?] Yukio smiled before putting piles of assessment questions in front of them and casually continued: [Write until here tomorrow morning, write that before noon along with this and this. Before night, you must finish everything and memorise it to bits. Otherwise, I will request Shiemi-san to bring food to reward you— How about this?]

[Wow, what a rare sight ☆]

Seeing the announcement posted on the corridor opposite of True Cross Academy, the chairman, Mephistopheles loudly exclaimed.

[Not even mentioning Shima-san, even Okumura-san doesn't need to retake...]

On the paper which was titled [Students who need to retake the final exam], their names were not there.

They barely passed and escaped the misfortune of failing.

[What kind of magic did you use?]

Mephisto glanced at Yukio who was next to him.

[Nothing much. Instead of me, it was more of Shiemi-san's efforts.]

[Oh... the girl of the Exorcist shop? What do you mean, Okumura-sensei?]

With a gaze which showed how gleaming over it would kill curiosity, Yukio put his index finger to his mouth.

The side of his mouth curved slightly as his eyes under his glasses closed into a line.

[Everything afterwards is a trade secret.]

Just to mention, after this cohabitation, the Exwires's comments towards him changed from [unexpectedly sinister] and [cold demon] to [demon in disguise], [cold-blooded], [hypocrite] and [no, he's completely crooked]. With this kind of development, nothing else needs to be said.

Chapter 5: Sir Pheles' Beautiful Day

◎ 費雷斯閣下優雅的一天



Hello everyone, we meet for the first time.

I am Mephisto Pheles. I love Assiah, I love Japan even more. At the same time, I am a gentleman who pursues the [[tranquil emptiness of heart]], [[warrior soul]] and [[moe]].^[46]

Don't look at me like this, I am a renowned knight of the True Cross Order—in other words, an exorcist. I use the pseudonym of Johann Faust the Fifth, taking the responsibility of being the Chairman of True Cross Academy..... Oh, sorry, of course I am also the principal of [that exorcist school].

Occasionally I will transform into a cute little dog to observe classes, because this year a [unique] student has arrived. He is my friend's adopted son, a very interesting teenager—No, I digress, sorry.

Today, I shall let everyone see a luxurious and elegant day in my life.

It's the first time it's being shown in Assiah, don't miss it.....

Then, 1, 2, 3 (eins, zwei, drei) ♪

—7:05 AM

My residence is the topmost floor of True Cross Academy. The view is excellent, especially the majestic view of the sun's rays reaching into the window. To me, it is quite glaring since I come from Gehenna, but the dreamlike beauty of the sunrise captivates me like the dark shadow of night covering Assiah at night.

Really, I digress again—

I hear that sufficient sleep can enhance the brain and bring radiance to the skin. Come to think of it, I just slept a sufficient one hour but my heart feels emptiness, which simply means that I'm unhappy ☆

Why is this so?

.....Ah, this unpleasantness must be how my younger brother Amaimon spoiled my precious video game yesterday. Really, his unhygienic actions are really intolerable, that game is the talk of the town of die-hard gamers! Although the ignorant are innocent, but this kind of offense cannot be forgiven.

—Ah, by the way, I must wear a bathrobe when resting in my room. This is

the heart of Japan that the ancient warriors have worn. I thought this would help me comprehend the secrets of this country. After coming to Japan, I immediately requested for a hundred bathrobes with different patterns. Today the number has tripled. One of my favourites is this one with a motif of a starry sky, using [Mephisto's special pink] as a background for this shining bathrobe ☆ Of course, this special product is personally designed by me, Mephisto. It is not being sold anywhere in the world, I apologise. [Pheles-sama, if you're awake, let me send you breakfast.]

Oh, my outstanding servant immediately noticed that I had woken up.

[Would you like an English or American breakfast? Or do you want me to arrange for breakfast from a Tokyo restaurant by supersonic plane?]^[47]

Hmm—warm coffee milk (café au lait), freshly boiled hot coffee, sumptuous eel soup, I have no mood to drink these today. How troubling.^[48]

[How about Chinese congee?]

This is ordinary, it does not whet my appetite.

[Vietnamese pho and green papaya salad?]

I want to try a charming breakfast that could touch people's heartstrings..... with this kind of situation, I usually have an ultimate order.

[I'll have a [Mephisto Special Breakfast] today.]

[Roger, I'll prepare it.]

The outstanding servant bowed before turning around and leaving, how excellent. An outstanding servant should be submissive and follow his part, following every order of the master. This is the best servant.

No matter what, he cannot be like a mother, nagging about nutrition and junk food.

Anyway, I recently saw Amaimon relishing [True Cross Academy Speciality • Roast Bomb]. However, that guy is different from me, the connoisseur. He is an animal that eats anything. Hmm... the food in other people's mouths is always more delicious. This is an unchanging principle whether in Assiah, Gehenna or even between humans and demons.

When I summoned my outstanding servant, he already pushed in a [Mephisto's Special Pink] trolley dilled with hamburgers, instant noodles, various cakes. There is even takoyaki in there, this is perfect. I'm so careless, I go as far as forgetting to list another important quality of an outstanding subordinate—.....

That is astuteness. To prevent creating unnecessary pressure, this is imperative.

[You called me?

[—No, nothing.]

The subordinate bowed after hearing my answer without asking anything else while starting to prepare the dining table.

The warm sunlight spilled endlessly in front of the whole window. The dining table shined brilliantly in that moment. Looking at the food I love gradually filling up the table, ah—what a refreshing morning.

[About today's schedule, at 1pm, there is a True Cross Order Headquarters meeting at the Vatican.]

After eating, when I wait for a change of clothes, the servant recited today's schedule.

Just saying, my full outfit is not the uniform of the True Cross Order, and I had it specially tailor-made for myself. It has the Mephisto special pink that I love most, with a scarf full of white polka dots..... Also, the coat buttons and tights are of the same pattern.

Ah, I digress again.

[Is the meeting at the Vatican Headquarters?]

The old thief occupying the Order—Oh, how could I say something bad accidentally, no, to face these old geezers who are too free and keep holding on to power, is so unexciting. My rare refreshing morning is seemingly ruined, this is not okay.

[Tell them that I suddenly have an emergency.]

[I heard that today's meeting includes important matters and the selection of

a new [Paladin](#)].

[After Fujimoto died, if there is going to be a current exorcist to be chosen as Paladin, it is most likely Angel.]

Although he who is like a flower in a greenhouse has standards not far from Fujimoto, but conquering the Order at a young age makes him easy to control.
[\[49\]](#)

[It's just for show, the meeting procedures are meaningless.]

[But.....]

[Those old geezers summoned me to investigate [that incident](#), those troublesome flies are best left ignored.]

[Please leave.] I said. The servant scrutinised my face before showing a terrified expression immediately but immediately recovering his original poker face. He bowed deeply before leaving.

This makes me happy.

If he said more, he would meet the same fate as his predecessor.

After getting used to it, changing a new servant will be very troublesome. I don't like to see something like this happen.

—So, the meeting was cancelled. How will I spend my spare time? I don't feel like working. Even if I am the chairman, I need the occasional break ☆

I should find the game that Amaimon spoilt yesterday.



——11:30AM

Nothing.....

Neither Amazan nor Yahaa! Have anything on auction.

I left messages on my Nixi and Witter for the time being, to wait for people to give me information.

Anyway, I'm bored at this point of time. The documents from Headquarters are piling up. I should go back to work.

Oh yeah, yesterday, the new teacher Okumura-sensei said that [I want to use the home economics lab at the high school at noon], for what purpose?

What does he want to do at the home economics lab? Hmm... I'm curious, so curious that I can't concentrate on work. He is the type of overly serious teacher, so he should not do mess things up. But I should still check out the situation as a senior teacher.

Ah, this is not an excuse to skive off work. I am a complete gentleman, yo.

Oh yes, it's been a long time since I last visited the school compound. If I meet any envoys from the first branch, it would complicate matters. I should transform into my dog form to go ahead.

Just saying, not all exorcists can transform. I am different from the masses.

Eh? Very cute right? Of course it is ☆ The co-op at the True Cross Academy and the stores at Mephisto Land sells merchandise of Dog Mephisto based on me. I honestly recommend the Dog Mephisto plushies. Sizes available are small, medium, large, extra large and super large. One of the super large plushies have a size on its back... Really, I digress again.

Huff... I finally reached the block with the cooking labs.

Transforming into dog form is cute, but the short legs make walking tiring.

Oh? Isn't the girl walking down the corridor Kamiki-san from the exorcist school? What a coincidence to meet her in this kind of place.

Kamiki-san is a genius in the class and also has the talent of being a knight out of the exorcist school. According to reports, she has the bloodline of witches and can summon two white foxes at the same time. The oldest son of the main branch of a certain temple started going to the school this year too. This year is a rare one with the arrival of students of such bright futures and this is something that the manpower lacking exorcist school should celebrate.

—Anyway, why is Kamiki-san staring at me so intently?

Her eyebrows were deeply locked as she looked at me without blinking. Maybe she hates animals? This is a rather rare trait in females. As a gentleman, I should leave as if nothing has happened... As I thought of that, she followed

me closely and looked around.

As expected, I could only barely know a person through personal information and occasional meetings. So Kamiki-san is such a suspicious person.

Oh, she walks towards me. What do I do? Ah, she squats down.

[What happened? Little doggy, are you lost?

.....

[Be good ≡ don't be afraid! Nee-san will help you find an owner~~≡]

[Mmm—soft and fluffy, how cute~~]

.....Ah! How could I stop thinking for a moment?

If she holds me at her chest, as a first-rate teacher, I will lose many things. This cannot be compared to sitting on Okumura-kun's knees.

[Ah, little doggy, where are you going?]

That was really close.

Whew, there should not be any problems if I leave this place. But honestly speaking, I was really shocked.

That Kamiki-san even.....

Females are sure unpredictable. I thought she was a cold and arrogant female student, yet I got to see her [tender] side. I never thought that it would happen in the 3 dimensional world, I could actually see the legendary [tsundere] with my own eyes...!

My favourite type is the [charismatic girl] or the [pretty girl with the sad past]. But with this experience, I think that the [tsundere] is also quite attractive. No, [moe] is indeed so deep, even I Mephisto bows down to it.

Alright, I've reached the cooking lab, I should transform back to my usual form.

Oh, why is the cooking lab a little noisy?

There seems to be an advertisement on the door, what does it say?

—Home-cooked food. Okumura-ya. Every day special set meal for 500 yen.

What vigorous and artistic writing. The [mura] kanji of Okumura-ya is impeccable.

No, it's wrong. What's this?!

This is the cooking lab of my True Cross Academy High School Department.

Why did it become a food stall at a street?

Also, there is a piece of scrap paper that has seemed to be disposed due to writing mistakes. Littering is not allowed on campus, how many times must I say this before it is understood? Really. Oh, this piece of paper is written on with black marker. Let me see...

—Lunch at 500 yen.

...

.....

.....

Ah! Due to being in shock, I stiffened, this is not okay.

It's just messy handwriting, making lunch look like cow meal.^[50]

But even if I used my knee to think, I could guess who wrote which of the two sheets of paper, invoking the nostalgia of my heart.

[Ah—thank you for visiting! Welco-]

[I want a daily special set with a large serving of miso soup.]

The exorcist school student who got so scared as if she ate nails is Moriyama-san. I never thought that such an earnest and cute girl would be in this. How sad.

[I don't remember giving you all permission to use the lab to run a business?]

[...Sorry.]

Oh, this miso soup is made by drying fish, the taste is amazing. Most importantly, this piece of mint leaf makes it irresistible.

[Otherwise give me at least 5000 yen for pocket money a month!]

[No way.]

[Why, aren't you a good person?]

The mackerel miso also tastes sweet.

This complete does not lose to a top-notch restaurant.

[Because 5000 yen notes are boring... 2000 yen notes are more interesting.]

[What kind of reason is this?! I can't even dream of this!!]

The vegetables are also fried just right.

If I alternate tasting these shred onions and spicy sesame oil mentaiko, I could eat all the white rice.

[If you don't like 2000 yen, how about 100 yen notes? Recently I like buying 100 yen things. Ah, another miso soup~]

[Who cares about your personal interests...!]

[Nii-san...]

Oh yeah, why is Okumura-kun so angry?



——PM02:35

I checked my phone. There is news about that game from witter ☆ It is really a good friend of a bored otaku.

meffy My precious game has been spoiled by my younger brother (idiot) ~□•°
•(/Δ)•°•□ Uwaahahah I don't think I can still buy it??? (´A`□) Oh, if you find it
Tell me about it ☆(*'|`)ノ°*:.。 Please and thank you..: °°*` °('|`*) 3 hours ago

hetareGamer @meffy I saw the game you wanted at a toy store in the South Cross shopping district~ Also, it's brand new, how amazing? 10 minutes ago

I immediately drove my beloved car there. Just saying, my beloved car—a limousine is also Mephisto pink as well as its interior with all sorts of famous wine from Assiah in the bar for me to enjoy. No need to mention, all these are custom-made, I apologise.

—Almost reaching the South Cross shopping district. Driving the limousine into the shopping district is too rude, I should park somewhere nearby and

walk.

As a gentleman, I have knowledge of such matters.

Oh... there is a gaming shop here. Elementary school students on the way home are gathering in front of the claw crane and the grand prize is also a Usakichi-kun plushie that I love most.^[51]

My hands feel itchy—ah! No, I must ignore it and go straight to the toy shop that hetareGamer told me about instead.

[Achi, you're brilliant! You're godly, getting three in one go.]

[Exactly, god of the crane machine, there isn't anything that you can't grab, is there?]

[Afterwards, give me that rabbit!]

[Huh?! This is too simple, I can get it even with my eyes closed.]

[Achi, you're fantastic!!]

.....

Ah, looks like my diamond-sold, iron-strong tolerance has reached its limit.

[—Ah? Who is this pink oji-san?]

[What does this oji-san want to do? He seems dangerous?]

[We're playing the crane machine yo—]

[Can you not disturb us?]

Kekeke... Little children, I'll let you witness the true god of the crane machine.

——PM04:10

Really, I accidentally made the children serious about this. How did I... anyway, being called and idolised as [god!] by innocent children feels fine, although I am a demon ☆ hehe ☆

Also, I bought lots of games at the toy shop and even caught the super rare Usakichi-kun plushie so it ended up well.

Oh? It seems that someone is in my room. Is it Neuhaus? If it is someone from my branch, I'll pretend that I'm not around.

[Nii-san, you're back.]

[...So it's just you, Amaimon.]

I have too many things to tell you.

I gave him a most condescending glance at my younger brother, only to see him take out the controller of the PSR slowly.

[I practiced hard at Nii-san's favourite fighting game.]

[Oh! How great.]

[Because I want to compete with Nii-san.]

Hmmph. You younger brother wanting to tackle me? Alright.

I'll let you see my prowess at [Moon Spirit Ancient Martial Arts Secret • Crescent Moon] then.

[Heavy collision] Crash!

[Moon Spirit Ancient Martial Arts Secret • Crescent Moon] Kill kill kill!!

[Wah ah ah!]

[KO!!]

[Revive and start again.]

[Nii-san is amazing—Hmm~~]

Of course, the difference between our experience is like heaven and earth.]

[How delicious. Om nom nom.]

[Uwoh oh oh?! How dare you—?! You ate my custom made [Mephisto Pink] coloured controller!!!

——PM07:20

[Nii-san, you look really sad, please cheer up.]

[...You do know that you're the cause of this, don't you?]

After yesterday's game, even my custom made controller was spoiled—no, was being eaten. I was so sad that I even felt afraid about it. Now my emotions are at rock bottom, full of thoughts about how it would be great for misfortune

to befall everyone but me... To heal the wounds of my heart, there is only one way: to eat my third most favourite food—[cheese pork monjayaki] ☆ [52]

Therefore I went to a deserted and satisfactory restaurant outside the school campus to have dinner.

Of course, I ordered cheese pork monjayaki and ramune. [53]

I have a painful memory of when everyone celebrated after the new students passed their exams and my cheese pork monjayaki was eaten by Okumura-kun. How despicable, that son of Satan should go die...!! —Just joking, I am obviously not that impulsive? I'm not boasting, I am a really good and kind older brother.

Let's see, it should be ready soon?

[Nii-san, it's delicious—om nom nom.]

[You don't say, the cheese pork monjayaki here is my third most favourite food, you know.]

[Nii-san, it's super delicious—om nom nom nom nom]

[Eh...w-wait!! I just said, this is my third most favourite!! Nobody swallows the metal plate along with it!! Ah~~! My cheese pork monjayaki!!!]

Damn son of Satan...!!

How dare he snatch what I like from me. How unfortunate to have younger brothers like this!!!

Nixi Meffy's Diary Sad ☆ [Viewable to friends of friends] XX/XX/20XX That stupid younger brother not only spoiled my PSR controller, he even ate my beloved cheese pork monjayaki~ ▯°°▯(≥∇≤)°°▯▯ Boohoo! Before this, an even younger brother (who is also an idiot) took it away. It sucks to be an older brother ☆ (/▯▯) Whimper. But an amazing work is now in my hands, I feel a little happier... (*'|`*) keke ♪ ≡ Like!

——AM00:00

In a large building still in construction of True Cross Academy, a huge white beast seems to be looking down at the world. Mephisto Pheles stood on one of the scaffolding like a shadow, showing an expression that was hard to describe.

His face revealed a dark smile that cannot be connected with his bright persona during the day. One could not tell if his expression seems to be angry, maybe he looks distracted and it looked like he was sneering.

[What a beautiful night scene.]

In the darkness, Mephisto Pheles (one who doesn't like light) muttered to himself.

The man tolerated the pain of being possessed by the magically strong Mephistopheles. His body was exhausted and under his eyes were deep eyebags while he gazed at the night scene listlessly.

[Anyway, this is the world which could not help celebrating after God's six days of creation.]

His possessed body spoke deeply.

[Then you should entertain and interest me—]

His mouth curled into a smile before being surrounded by darkness before fusing with it.

The action of pushing both hands away looked like a contortionist's act and also looked like an ecstatic child staring at colourful toys in front of him.



Translator notes and references

1. ↑ (t/n: I'm guessing that Yukio's referring to Shura or who else could it be?)
2. ↑ ✝ (t/n: this cross is used in the novel as a divider so I also adopted it)
3. ↑ (t/n: I forgot what's the name of the church. I just translated it from the text so correct me if I'm wrong.)
4. ↑ (t/n: Sclera is the white part of the eye by the way.)
5. ↑ (t/n: The verses refer to the seven deadly sins and its lesser known counterpart, the seven heavenly virtues)
6. ↑ (t/n: Temptaint is used instead of mashou in the English manga. In case you've forgotten, a temptaint/mashou is gotten from making contact with demons, so the person can now see demons for the rest of his life)
7. ↑ (t/n: So I debated with myself how should Yukio address Rin without using his name. In the end I decided to use older brother if it's just conversation, Nii-san in Yukio's recollections and Aniki for the last one because Yukio uses 我哥 instead of 哥哥. However, Shirou's case is a bit more complicated since 養父 which means adoptive father is used instead, so I'm sticking to Father although Tou-san can be used too. And Father can also refer to how Shirou is a priest as well.)
8. ↑ (t/n: onigiri is Japanese rice balls by the way)
9. ↑ (t/n: 1. 明智老弟 was probably said sarcastically so Yukio's reply is like this.

2. Regarding the Russian roulette thing, Rin being the book dumb person he is, pronounces it wrongly by jumbling the syllables before Yukio corrects him. Rin says 輪羅斯俄盤 (lún lúo sī é pán) and Yukio says 俄羅斯輪盤 (é lúo sī lún pán). 俄羅斯 is Russia and 輪盤 is roulette, so yeah.

Oh, roulette is actually pronounced as rue-let due to the word's French origins. It's not row-lert that I originally thought. It's like how crepe is pronounced as crap or crape but never creep.

In Japanese, Russian roulette is ロシアンルーレット(roshian ruuretto) so Rin's might have said ルシアンローレット(rushian rouretto).)

10. ↑ (t/n: Mochi is a type of Japanese rice cake)
11. ↑ (t/n: the saying 畫蛇添足(huàshétiānzú) is used here. It means to overdo things but it literally means to add legs to a snake.)
12. ↑ (t/n: The True Cross Academy is for loaded people, remember?)
13. ↑ (t/n: Rin's favourite food LOL. It consists of meat in a soup with vegetables and seasoning)
14. ↑ (t/n: Again, Rin is saying something wrongly while Yukio corrects him, just like in the previous part with the Russian roulette pun. The words this time are 浮刻版 and 复刻版 (fúkèbǎn) and (fúkèbǎn) which are really almost the same but the Chinese intonation differs. Also, an engraved version of something means that it's a reprint of something out of print with some modifications. It could also mean remake actually. IDK what's the Japanese for this, but I think it's another case of wrong pronunciation on Rin's side. Unlike the previous example, I can't translate this pun to English quite well, so I just replaced one syllable of engraved. I hope it's understandable?)
15. ↑ (t/n: The phrase used is我是二者;二者亦非我 which is written in a style that is more old-fashioned like a saying instead of the usual modern language.)
16. ↑ (t/n: BUT WAIT ISN'T THAT WHAT WE FANS DO ALL THE TIME? I mean, comparing characters to ourselves and watching children's shows? Oh Yukio, no wonder reading Jump SQ is a hobby of his.)
17. ↑ (t/n: The term used which is 魍魎wǎng liǎng translates to monster/sprite. But with the context of the fog thing I think they are most likely Coal Tars.)
18. ↑ (t/n: This volunteer has a name but I can't translate it. Therefore he will remain nameless in my translation)
19. ↑ (t/n: demon sword aka Kurikara) controlled the flames, by right his older brother should not be able to see the coal tar and demons. This

means that the opponent is not targeting Rin.

20. ↑ (t/n: the (?) was in the original text as well for some reasons so I kept it there.)
21. ↑ (t/n: The phrase used is 瓮中捉鳖 which literally means catch a turtle in a jar but it means to make oneself an easy target)
22. ↑ (t/n: For the 'cause' thing, it can also be interpreted as fate/destiny since the 因缘 phrase is used. 缘 sort of implies that karma/fate is involved somehow (in an Asian context, one example is the red string of fate thing). But for a more clear definition, I'll just be neutral here. Also, the situation is really kind of amusing despite the chaos that is happening)
23. ↑ [t/n: I'm sorry if it looks awkward in English since this is more of a Chinese/Japanese pun here. Here, Rin says 钳子(qiánzi) which means forceps. Yukio corrects him with 潜意识 (qiányìshí) which means subconscious. In Japanese, I guess that the equivalent is 鉗子 (かんし/kanshi) versus 下意識 (かいしき/kaishiki)]
24. ↑ (t/n: DUUNNNN DUN DUN DUN DUN DUUUNNNNN. My first thought was A DISASTER BEYOND YOUR IMAGINATION WILL OCCUR since I'm such a Phantom of the Opera fan. I digress. But seriously how would Rin react hmm.)
25. ↑ (t/n: 1800 yen is around USD\$17)
26. ↑ (t/n: Closterium is a type of algae, therefore the photosynthesis reference)
27. ↑ (t/n: I have no idea how does one say sleep or nap in a childish way but that's the way Izumo said it earlier)
28. ↑ (t/n: aka tempaint/ mashou) so he was very reliable.
29. ↑ [t/n: In Japanese, catnip (木天蓼) is pronounced as matatabi. Shiemi thought that matatabi was a type of tabi (足袋), which is a type of Japanese footwear. For the rest of this conversation when needed, I will use matatabi instead of catnip so that the joke can be understood better.]
30. ↑ (t/n: 夏/natsu means summer)
31. ↑ (t/n: 三丘/sankyuu means three hills)
32. ↑ (t/n: the dog has a name but I couldn't translate so it's remaining

nameless)

33. ↑ (t/n: there's a slang which I'm p sure is about sex but idk how to translate it)
34. ↑ (t/n: it's this famous sculpture of course)
35. ↑ (t/n: In Japanese, 恵 can be read as Kei or Megumi due to onyomi and kunyomi. It's a kanji pun, basically.)
36. ↑ (t/n: the brother thing is more like a bro thing than actual siblings of course)
37. ↑ (t/n: Kanji for Yukio is 雪男 while kanji for Rin is 燐. Although Yukio is made up of 2 characters and Rin is 1 character, Rin is way harder to write than Yukio)
38. ↑ (t/n: I have no idea how to translate this. In the Chinese version which I'm translating from, Yukio and Rin talk about zhuyin which is like the Chinese equivalent of hiragana when hanyu pinyin (romanji) is not used. I guess in the Japanese version, they'd talk about using hiragana instead. I have no Japanese copy to refer to so I'm just making assumptions here and I can't confirm. Otherwise please feel to ignore this orz)
39. ↑ (t/n: shouldn't it be 'mysterious' instead? or does this mean that Shima's English isn't that good either?)
40. ↑ (t/n: In vision tests, decimals from 0.1 to 2 are used to measure visual acuity with 1.0 being perfect vision or 20/20 using the feet scale. A 1.2 scale would mean that one can see around a line beyond the 1.0 or 20/20 line which is actually beyond perfect vision)
41. ↑ (t/n: In case you forget, Yaozou is Shima's father.)
42. ↑ (t/n: Donna Donna is a folk song about a calf being lead to slaughter. You can listen to it here.)
43. ↑ (t/n: Hikaru GENJI (光GENJI) is the name of a Japanese idol group. It is a homonym of Hikaru Genji (光源氏), who is the protagonist of Genji Monogatari [The Tale of Genji])
44. ↑ (t/n: The Ten Food Square Hut) is [Houjou]?! I am completely defeated by you.]
45. ↑ (t/n: Amida Butsu is the Japanese pronunciation of Amitabha who is the primary Buddha of Buddhism. When used as an exclamation, it has a similar meaning as oh my god or god have mercy)

46. ↑ (t/n: I'm sorry for awkward translating but you just have to know that Mephisto is an otaku.)
47. ↑ (t/n: The second sentence uses the old-fashioned way of saying breakfast and restaurant. It's untranslatable but I thought I should mention it.)
48. ↑ (t/n: Café au lait is coffee with added hot milk. Contrast with milk coffee which has room temperature or cold milk added)
49. ↑ (t/n: The 'flower in a greenhouse' thing is a very common Chinese saying and I translated it literally. Basically it's a term mocking a sheltered person)
50. ↑ (t/n: I have no way to translate this pun. Lunch in Japanese is 午餐 which literally means afternoon meal. On the paper, it is written as 牛餐 which has the middle stroke being slightly longer than the previous. 午 means afternoon, 餐 means meal and 牛 means cow, so that's why I translated it this way.)
51. ↑ (t/n: Usakichi is of course a reference to Katou-sensei's earlier work, Robot to Usakichi)
52. ↑ (t/n: Monjayaki is a type of Japanese pan-fried batter with ingredients according to Wikipedia)
53. ↑ (t/n: ramune is a type of Japanese carbonated soft drink that is usually lemon-lime flavoured, deriving its name)